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THE TRAGIC MUSE

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BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

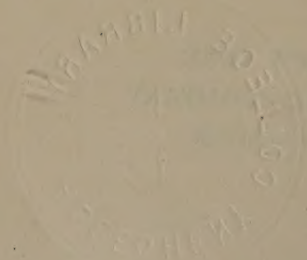


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THE TRAGIC MUSE.

I.

THE people of France have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing, are, to their perception, an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery. This view might have derived encouragement, a few years ago, in Paris, from the manner in which four persons sat together in silence, one fine day about noon, in the garden, as it is called, of the Palais de l'Industrie—the central court of the great glazed bazaar where, among plants and parterres, graveled walks and thin fountains, are ranged the figures and groups, the monuments and busts, which form, in the annual exhibition of the Salon, the department of statuary. The spirit of observation is naturally high at the Salon, quickened by a thousand artful or artless appeals, but no particular tension of the visual sense would have been required to embrace the character of the four persons in question. As a solicitation of the eye on definite grounds, they

too constituted a successful plastic fact ; and even the most superficial observer would have perceived them to be striking products of an insular neighborhood, representatives of that tweed-and-waterproof class with which, on the recurrent occasions when the English turn out for a holiday — Christmas and Easter, Whitsuntide and the autumn — Paris besprinkles itself at a night's notice. They had about them the indefinable professional look of the British traveler abroad ; that air of preparation for exposure, material and moral, which is so oddly combined with the serene revelation of security and of persistence, and which excites, according to individual susceptibility, the ire or the admiration of foreign communities. They were the more unmistakable as they illustrated very favorably the energetic race to which they had the honor to belong. The fresh, diffused light of the Salon made them clear and important ; they were finished productions, in their way, and ranged there motionless, on their green bench, they were almost as much on exhibition as if they had been hung on the line.

Three ladies and a young man, they were obviously a family — a mother, two daughters and a son — a circumstance which had the effect at once of making each member of the group doubly typical and of helping to account for their fine taciturnity. They were not, with each other, on terms of ceremony, and moreover they were probably fatigued with their course among the

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pictures, the rooms on the upper floor. Their attitude, on the part of visitors who had superior features, even if they might appear to some passers-by to have neglected a fine opportunity for completing these features with an expression, was, after all, a kind of tribute to the state of exhaustion, of bewilderment, to which the genius of France is still capable of reducing the proud.

“En v’la des abrutis !” more than one of their fellow-gazers might have been heard to exclaim ; and certain it is that there was something depressed and discouraged in this interesting group, who sat looking vaguely before them, not noticing the life of the place, somewhat as if each had a private anxiety. A very close observer would have guessed that though on many questions they were closely united, this present anxiety was not the same for each. If they looked grave, moreover, this was doubtless partly the result of their all being dressed in mourning, as if for a recent bereavement. The eldest of the three ladies had indeed a face of a fine austere mould, which would have been moved to gayety only by some force more insidious than any she was likely to recognize in Paris. Cold, still and considerably worn, it was neither stupid nor hard, but it was firm, narrow and sharp. This competent matron, acquainted evidently with grief, but not weakened by it, had a high forehead, to which the quality of the skin gave a singular polish — it glittered even when seen at a distance ; a nose which

achieved a high, free curve ; and a tendency to throw back her head and carry it well above her, as if to disengage it from the possible entanglements of the rest of her person. If you had seen her walk, you would have perceived that she trod the earth in a manner suggesting that in a world where she had long since discovered that one could n't have one's own way, one could never tell what annoying aggression might take place, so that it was well, from hour to hour, to save what one could. Lady Agnes saved her head, her white triangular forehead, over which her closely crinkled flaxen hair, reproduced in different shades in her children, made a sort of looped silken canopy, like the marquee at a garden party. Her daughters were tall, like herself — that was visible even as they sat there — and one of them, the younger evidently, was very pretty : a straight, slender, gray-eyed English girl, with a “good” figure and a fresh complexion. The sister, who was not pretty, was also straight and slender and gray-eyed. But the gray, in this case, was not so pure, nor were the straightness and the slenderness so maidenly. The brother of these young ladies had taken off his hat, as if he felt the air of the summer day heavy in the great pavilion. He was a lean, strong, clear-faced youth, with a straight nose and light-brown hair, which lay continuously and profusely back from his forehead, so that to smooth it from the brow to the neck but a single movement of the hand was

required. I cannot describe him better than by saying that he was the sort of young Englishman who looks particularly well abroad, and whose general aspect—his inches, his limbs, his friendly eyes, the modulation of his voice, the cleanness of his flesh-tints and the fashion of his garments—excites on the part of those who encounter him in far countries on the ground of a common speech a delightful sympathy of race. This sympathy is sometimes qualified by an apprehension of undue literalness, but it almost revels as soon as such a danger is dispelled. We shall see quickly enough how accurate a measure it might have taken of Nicholas Dormer. There was food for suspicion, perhaps, in the wandering blankness that sat at moments in his eyes, as if he had no attention at all, not the least in the world, at his command; but it is no more than just to add, without delay, that this discouraging symptom was known, among those who liked him, by the indulgent name of dreaminess. For his mother and sisters, for instance, his dreaminess was notorious. He is the more welcome to the benefit of such an interpretation as there is always held to be something engaging in the combination of the muscular and the musing, the mildness of strength.

After some time, a period during which these good people might have appeared to have come, individually, to the Palais de l'Industrie much less to see the works of art than to think over

their domestic affairs, the young man, rousing himself from his reverie, addressed one of the girls.

"I say, Biddy, why should we sit moping here all day? Come and take a turn about with me."

His younger sister, while he got up, leaned forward a little, looking round her, but she gave, for the moment, no further sign of complying with his invitation.

"Where shall we find you, then, if Peter comes?" inquired the other Miss Dormer, making no movement at all.

"I dare say Peter won't come. He'll leave us here to cool our heels."

"Oh, Nick, dear!" Biddy exclaimed in a sweet little voice of protest. It was plainly her theory that Peter would come, and even, a little, her apprehension that she might miss him should she quit that spot.

"We shall come back in a quarter of an hour. Really, I must look at these things," Nick declared, turning his face to a marble group which stood near them, on the right — a man, with the skin of a beast round his loins, tussling with a naked woman in some primitive effort of courtship or capture.

Lady Agnes followed the direction of her son's eyes, and then observed:

"Everything seems very dreadful. I should think Biddy had better sit still. Has n't she seen enough horrors up above?"

"I dare say that if Peter comes, Julia will be with him," the elder girl remarked irrelevantly.

"Well, then, he can take Julia about. That will be more proper," said Lady Agnes.

"Mother, dear, she does n't care a rap about art. It's a fearful bore looking at fine things with Julia," Nick rejoined.

"Won't you go with him, Grace?" said Biddy, appealing to her sister.

"I think she has awfully good taste!" Grace exclaimed, not answering this inquiry.

"*Don't* say nasty things about her!" Lady Agnes broke out, solemnly, to her son, after resting her eyes on him a moment with an air of reluctant reprobation.

"I say nothing but what she'd say herself," the young man replied. "About some things she has very good taste, but about this kind of thing she has no taste at all."

"That's better, I think," said Lady Agnes, turning her eyes again to the "kind of thing" that her son appeared to designate.

"She's awfully clever — awfully!" Grace went on, with decision.

"Awfully, awfully!" her brother repeated, standing in front of her and smiling down at her.

"You *are* nasty, Nick. You know you are," said the young lady, but more in sorrow than in anger.

Biddy got up at this, as if the accusatory tone

prompted her to place herself generously at his side. "Mightn't you go and order lunch, in that place, you know?" she asked of her mother. "Then we would come back when it was ready."

"My dear child, I can't order lunch," Lady Agnes replied, with a cold impatience which seemed to intimate that she had problems far more important than those of victualing to contend with.

"I mean Peter, if he comes. I am sure he's up in everything of that sort."

"Oh, hang Peter!" Nick exclaimed. "Leave him out of account, and *do* order lunch, mother; but not cold beef and pickles."

"I must say — about *him* — you're not nice," Biddy ventured to remark to her brother, hesitating, and even blushing, a little.

"You make up for it, my dear," the young man answered, giving her chin — a very charming, rotund little chin — a friendly whisk with his forefinger.

"I can't imagine what you've got against him," her ladyship murmured, gravely.

"Dear mother, it's disappointed fondness," Nick argued. "They won't answer one's notes; they won't let one know where they are nor what to expect. 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned;' nor like a man either."

"Peter has such a tremendous lot to do — it's a very busy time at the Embassy; there are sure

to be reasons," Biddy explained, with her pretty eyes.

"Reasons enough, no doubt!" said Lady Agnes, who accompanied these words with an ambiguous sigh, however, as if in Paris even the best reasons would naturally be bad ones.

"Does n't Julia write to you, does n't she answer you the very day?" Grace inquired, looking at Nick as if she were the courageous one.

He hesitated a moment, returning her glance with a certain severity. "What do you know about my correspondence? No doubt I ask too much," he went on; "I'm so attached to them. Dear old Peter, dear old Julia!"

"She's younger than you, my dear!" cried the elder girl, still resolute.

"Yes, nineteen days."

"I'm glad you know her birthday."

"She knows yours; she always gives you something," Lady Agnes resumed, to her son.

"Her taste is good *then*, is n't it, Nick?" Grace Dormer continued.

"She makes charming presents; but, dear mother, it is n't *her* taste. It's her husband's."

"Her husband's?"

"The beautiful objects of which she disposes so freely are the things he collected, for years, laboriously, devotedly, poor man!"

"She disposes of them to you, but not to others," said Lady Agnes. "But that's all right," she added, as if this might have been taken for

a complaint of the limitations of Julia's bounty. "She has to select, among so many, and that's a proof of taste," her ladyship went on.

"You can't say she doesn't choose lovely ones," Grace remarked to her brother, in a tone of some triumph.

"My dear, they are all lovely. George Dallow's judgment was so sure, he was incapable of making a mistake," Nicholas Dormer returned.

"I don't see how you can talk of him; he was dreadful," said Lady Agnes.

"My dear, if he was good enough for Julia to marry, he is good enough for one to talk of."

"She did him a great honour."

"I dare say; but he was not unworthy of it. No such intelligent collection of beautiful objects has been made in England in our time."

"You think too much of beautiful objects," returned her ladyship.

"I thought you were just now implying that I thought too little."

"It's very nice — his having left Julia so well off," Biddy interposed, soothingly, as if she foresaw a tangle.

"He treated her *en grand seigneur*, absolutely," Nick went on.

"He used to look greasy, all the same," Grace Dormer pursued, with a kind of dull irreconcilability. "His name ought to have been Tal-low."

"You are not saying what Julia would like, if

that's what you are trying to say," her brother remarked.

"Don't be vulgar, Grace," said Lady Agnes.

"I know Peter Sherringham's birthday!" Biddy broke out innocently, as a pacific diversion. She had passed her hand into her brother's arm, to signify her readiness to go with him, while she scanned the remoter portions of the garden as if it had occurred to her that to direct their steps in some such sense might after all be the shorter way to get at Peter.

"He's too much older than you, my dear," Grace rejoined, discouragingly.

"That's why I've noticed it — he's thirty-four. Do you call that too old? I don't care for slobbering infants!" Biddy cried.

"Don't be vulgar," Lady Agnes enjoined again.

"Come, Bid, we'll go and be vulgar together; for that's what we are, I'm afraid," her brother said to her. "We'll go and look at all these low works of art."

"Do you really think it's necessary to the child's development?" Lady Agnes demanded, as the pair turned away. Nicholas Dormer was struck as by a kind of challenge, and he paused, lingering a moment, with his little sister on his arm. "What we've been through this morning in this place, and what you've paraded before our eyes — the murders, the tortures, all kinds of disease and indecency!"

Nick looked at his mother as if this sudden protest surprised him, but as if also there were lurking explanations of it which he quickly guessed. Her resentment had the effect not so much of animating her cold face as of making it colder, less expressive, though visibly prouder. "Ah, dear mother, don't do the British matron!" he exclaimed, good-humoredly.

"British matron is soon said! I don't know what they are coming to."

"How odd that you should have been struck only with the disagreeable things, when, for myself, I have felt it to be most interesting, the most suggestive morning I have passed for ever so many months!"

"Oh, Nick, Nick!" Lady Agnes murmured, with a strange depth of feeling.

"I like them better in London — they are much less unpleasant," said Grace Dormer.

"They are things you can look at," her ladyship went on. "We certainly make the better show."

"The subject does n't matter; it's the treatment, the treatment!" Biddy announced, in a voice like the tinkle of a silver bell.

"Poor little Bid!" her brother cried, breaking into a laugh.

"How can I learn to model, mamma dear, if I don't look at things and if I don't study them?" the girl continued.

This inquiry passed unheeded, and Nicholas

Dormer said to his mother, more seriously, but with a certain kind explicitness, as if he could make a particular allowance: "This place is an immense stimulus to me; it refreshes me, excites me, it's such an exhibition of artistic life. It's full of ideas, full of refinements; it gives one such an impression of artistic experience. They try everything, they feel everything. While you were looking at the murders, apparently, I observed an immense deal of curious and interesting work. There are too many of them, poor devils; so many who must make their way, who must attract attention. Some of them can only *taper fort*, stand on their heads, turn summersaults or commit deeds of violence, to make people notice them. After that, no doubt, a good many will be quieter. But I don't know; to-day I'm in an appreciative mood — I feel indulgent even to them: they give me an impression of intelligence, of eager observation. All art is one — remember that, Biddy, dear," the young man continued, looking down at his sister with a smile. "It's the same great, many-headed effort, and any ground that's gained by an individual, any spark that's struck in any province, is of use and of suggestion to all the others. We are all in the same boat."

"'We,' do you say, my dear? Are you really setting up for an artist?" Lady Agnes asked.

Nick hesitated a moment. "I was speaking for Biddy!"

"But you *are* one, Nick — you are!" the girl cried.

Lady Agnes looked for an instant as if she were going to say once more, "Don't be vulgar!" But she suppressed these words, if she had intended them, and uttered others, few in number and not completely articulate, to the effect that she hated talking about art. While her son spoke she had watched him as if she failed to follow him; yet something in the tone of her exclamation seemed to denote that she had understood him only too well.

"We are all in the same boat," Biddy repeated, smiling at her.

"Not me, if you please!" Lady Agnes replied. "It's horrid, messy work, your modeling."

"Ah, but look at the results!" said the girl, eagerly, glancing about at the monuments in the garden as if in regard even to them she were, through that unity of art that her brother had just proclaimed, in some degree an effective cause.

"There's a great deal being done here — a real vitality," Nicholas Dormer went on, to his mother, in the same reasonable, informing way. "Some of these fellows go very far."

"They do, indeed!" said Lady Agnes.

"I'm fond of young schools, like this movement in sculpture," Nick remarked, with his slightly provoking serenity.

"They're old enough to know better!"

"May n't I look, mamma? It *is* necessary to my development," Biddy declared.

"You may do as you like," said Lady Agnes, with dignity.

"She ought to see good work, you know," the young man went on.

"I leave it to your sense of responsibility." This statement was somewhat majestic, and for a moment, evidently, it tempted Nick, almost provoked him, or at any rate suggested to him an occasion to say something that he had on his mind. Apparently, however, he judged the occasion on the whole not good enough, and his sister Grace interposed with the inquiry —

"Please, mamma, are we *never* going to lunch?"

"Ah, mother, mother!" the young man murmured, in a troubled way, looking down at Lady Agnes with a deep fold in his forehead.

For her, also, as she returned his look, it seemed an occasion; but with this difference, that she had no hesitation in taking advantage of it. She was encouraged by his slight embarrassment; for ordinarily Nick was not embarrassed. "You used to have so much," she went on; "but sometimes I don't know what has become of it — it seems all, *all* gone!"

"Ah, mother, mother!" he exclaimed again, as if there were so many things to say that it was impossible to choose. But this time he stepped closer, bent over her, and, in spite of the publi-

city of their situation, gave her a quick, expressive kiss. The foreign observer whom I took for granted in beginning to sketch this scene would have had to admit that the rigid English family had, after all, a capacity for emotion. Grace Dormer, indeed, looked round her to see if at this moment they were noticed. She discovered with satisfaction that they had escaped.

II.

NICK DORMER walked away with Biddy, but he had not gone far before he stopped in front of a clever bust, where his mother, in the distance, saw him playing in the air with his hand, carrying out by this gesture, which presumably was ap-
plausive, some critical remark he had made to his sister. Lady Agnes raised her glass to her eyes by the long handle to which rather a clanking chain was attached, perceiving that the bust represented an ugly old man with a bald head ; at which her ladyship indefinitely sighed, though it was not apparent in what way such an object could be detrimental to her daughter. Nick passed on, and quickly paused again ; this time, his mother discerned, it was before the marble image of a grimacing woman. Presently she lost sight of him ; he wandered behind things, looking at them all round.

"I ought to get plenty of ideas for my modeling, ought n't I, Nick?" his sister inquired of him, after a moment.

"Ah, my poor child, what shall I say?"

"Don't you think I have any capacity for ideas?" the girl continued, ruefully.

"Lots of them, no doubt. But the capacity

for applying them, for putting them into practice — how much of that have you ?”

“How can I tell till I try ?”

“What do you mean by trying, Biddy, dear ?”

“Why, you know — you’ve seen me.”

“Do you call that trying ?” her brother asked, smiling at her.

“Ah, Nick !” murmured the girl, sensitively. Then, with more spirit, she went on : “And please, what do you ?”

“Well, this, for instance ;” and her companion pointed to another bust — a head of a young man, in terra cotta, at which they had just arrived ; a modern young man, to whom, with his thick neck, his little cap, and his wide ring of dense curls, the artist had given the air of a Florentine of the time of Lorenzo.

Biddy looked at the image a moment. “Ah, that’s not trying ; that’s succeeding.”

“Not altogether ; it’s only trying seriously.”

“Well, why should n’t I be serious ?”

“Mother would n’t like it. She has inherited the queer old superstition that art is pardonable only so long as it’s bad — so long as it’s done at odd hours, for a little distraction, like a game of tennis or of whist. The only thing that can justify it, the effort to carry it as far as one can (which you can’t do without time and singleness of purpose), she regards as just the dangerous, the criminal element. It’s the oddest hind-part-before view, the drollest immorality.”

•

"She does n't want one to be professional," Biddy remarked, as if she could do justice to every system.

"Better leave it alone, then : there are duffers enough."

"I don't want to be a duffer," Biddy said. "But I thought you encouraged me."

"So I did, my poor child. It was only to encourage myself."

"With your own work — your painting?"

"With my futile, my ill-starred endeavors. Union is strength ; so that we might present a wider front, a larger surface of resistance."

Biddy was silent a moment, while they continued their tour of observation. She noticed how her brother passed over some things quickly, his first glance sufficing to show him whether they were worth another, and recognized in a moment the figures that had something in them. His tone puzzled her, but his certainty of eye impressed her, and she felt what a difference there was yet between them — how much longer, in every case, she would have taken to discriminate. She was aware that she could rarely tell whether a picture was good or bad until she had looked at it for ten minutes ; and modest little Biddy was compelled privately to add, "And often not even then." She was mystified, as I say (Nick was often mystifying — it was his only fault), but one thing was definite : her brother was exceedingly clever. It was the consciousness of this that

made her remark at last, "I don't so much care whether or no I please mamma, if I please you."

"Oh, don't lean on me. I'm a wretched broken reed — I'm no use *really*!" Nick Dormer exclaimed.

"Do you mean you're a duffer?" Biddy asked, alarmed.

"Frightful, frightful!"

"So that you mean to give up your work — to let it alone, as you advise *me*?"

"It has never been my work, Biddy. If it had, it would be different. I should stick to it."

"And you *won't* stick to it?" the girl exclaimed, standing before him, open-eyed.

Her brother looked into her eyes a moment, and she had a compunction; she feared she was indiscreet and was worrying him. "Your questions are much simpler than the elements out of which my answer should come."

"A great talent — what is simpler than that?"

"One thing, dear Biddy: no talent at all!"

"Well, yours is so real, you can't help it."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Nicholas Dormer. "Let us go look at that big group."

"We shall see if it's real?" Biddy went on, as she accompanied him.

"No; we shall see if I can't help it. What nonsense Paris makes one talk!" the young man added, as they stopped in front of the composition. This was true, perhaps, but not in a sense which he found himself tempted to deplore. The

present was far from being his first visit to the French capital : he had often quitted England, and usually made a point of "putting in," as he called it, a few days there on the outward journey to the Continent or on the return ; but on this occasion the emotions, for the most part agreeable, attendant upon a change of air and of scene had been more punctual and more acute than for a long time before, and stronger the sense of novelty, refreshment, amusement, of manifold suggestions looking to that quarter of thought to which, on the whole, his attention was apt most frequently, though not most confessedly, to stray. He was fonder of Paris than most of his countrymen, though not so fond, perhaps, as some other captivated aliens : the place had always had the power of quickening sensibly the life of reflection and of observation within him. It was a good while since the reflections engendered by his situation there had been so favorable to the city by the Seine ; a good while, at all events, since they had ministered so to excitement, to exhilaration, to ambition, even to a restlessness which was not prevented from being agreeable by the nervous quality in it. Dormer could have given the reason of this unwonted glow ; but his preference was very much to keep it to himself. Certainly, to persons not deeply knowing, or at any rate not deeply curious, in relation to the young man's history, the explanation might have seemed to beg the question, consisting as it did of the simple

formula that he had at last come to a crisis. Why a crisis — what was it, and why had he not come to it before? The reader shall learn these things in time, if he care enough for them.

For several years Nicholas Dormer had not omitted to see the Salon, which the general voice, this season, pronounced not particularly good. None the less, it was the exhibition of this season that, for some cause connected with his "crisis," made him think fast, produced that effect which he had spoken of to his mother, as a sense of artistic life. The precinct of the marbles and bronzes appealed to him especially to-day; the glazed garden, not florally rich, with its new productions alternating with perfunctory plants and its queer, damp smell, partly the odor of plastic clay, of the studios of sculptors, spoke to him with the voice of old associations, of other visits, of companionships that were closed — an insinuating eloquence which was at the same time, somehow, identical with the general sharp contagion of Paris. There was youth in the air, and a multitudinous newness, forever reviving, and the diffusion of a hundred talents, ingenuities, experiments. The summer clouds made shadows on the roof of the great building; the white images, hard in their crudity, spotted the place with provocations; the rattle of plates at the restaurant sounded sociable in the distance, and our young man congratulated himself more than ever that he had not missed the exhibition. He

felt that it would help him to settle something. At the moment he made this reflection his eye fell upon a person who appeared — just in the first glimpse — to carry out the idea of help. He uttered a lively ejaculation, which, however, in its want of finish, Bidy failed to understand; so pertinent, so relevant and congruous, was the other party to this encounter.

The girl's attention followed her brother's, resting with his on a young man who faced them without seeing them, engaged as he was in imparting to two persons who were with him his ideas about one of the works exposed to view. What Bidy discerned was that this young man was fair and fat and of the middle stature; he had a round face and a short beard, and on his crown a mere reminiscence of hair, as the fact that he carried his hat in his hand permitted it to be observed. Bridget Dormer, who was quick, estimated him immediately as a gentleman, but a gentleman unlike any other gentleman she had ever seen. She would have taken him for a foreigner, but that the words proceeding from his mouth reached her ear and imposed themselves as a rare variety of English. It was not that a foreigner might not have spoken excellent English, nor yet that the English of this young man was not excellent. It had, on the contrary, a conspicuous and aggressive perfection, and Bidy was sure that no mere learner would have ventured to play such tricks with the tongue. He

seemed to draw rich effects and wandering airs from it—to modulate and manipulate it as he would have done a musical instrument. Her view of the gentleman's companions was less operative, save that she made the rapid reflection that they were people whom in any country, from China to Peru, one would immediately have taken for natives. One of them was an old lady with a shawl; that was the most salient way in which she presented herself. The shawl was an ancient, voluminous fabric of embroidered cashmere, such as many ladies wore forty years ago in their walks abroad, and such as no lady wears to-day. It had fallen half off the back of the wearer, but at the moment Biddy permitted herself to consider her she gave it a violent jerk and brought it up to her shoulders again, where she continued to arrange and settle it, with a good deal of jauntiness and elegance, while she listened to the talk of the gentleman. Biddy guessed that this little transaction took place very frequently, and she was not unaware that it gave the old lady a droll, factitious, faded appearance, as if she were singularly out of step with the age. The other person was very much younger—she might have been a daughter—and had a pale face, a low forehead and thick, dark hair. What she chiefly had, however, Biddy rapidly discovered, was a pair of largely-gazing eyes. Our young friend was helped to the discovery by the accident of their resting at this moment, for a little while—it struck Biddy as

very long — on her own. Both of these ladies were clad in light, thin, scanty gowns, giving an impression of flowered figures and odd transparencies, and in low shoes, which showed a great deal of stocking and were ornamented with large rosettes. Biddy's slightly agitated perception traveled directly to their shoes: they suggested to her vaguely that the wearers were dancers — connected possibly with the old-fashioned exhibition of the shawl-dance. By the time she had taken in so much as this the mellifluous young man had perceived and addressed himself to her brother. He came forward with an extended hand. Nick greeted him and said it was a happy chance — he was uncommonly glad to see him.

"I never come across you — I don't know why," Nick remarked, while the two, smiling, looked each other up and down, like men reunited after a long interval.

"Oh, it seems to me there's reason enough: our paths in life are so different." Nick's friend had a great deal of manner, as was evinced by his fashion of saluting her without knowing her.

"Different, yes, but not so different as that. Don't we both live in London, after all, and in the nineteenth century?"

"Ah, my dear Dormer, excuse me: I don't live in the nineteenth century. *Jamais de la vie!*"

"Nor in London, either?"

"Yes — when I'm not in Samarcand! But

surely we've diverged since the old days. I adore what you burn; you burn what I adore." While the stranger spoke he looked cheerfully, hospitably, at Biddy; not because it was she, she easily guessed, but because it was in his nature to desire a second auditor — a kind of sympathetic gallery. Her life, somehow, was filled with shy people, and she immediately knew that she had never encountered any one who seemed so to know his part and recognize his cues.

"How do you know what I adore?" Nicholas Dormer inquired.

"I know well enough what you used to."

"That's more than I do myself; there were so many things.

"Yes, there are many things — many, many: that's what makes life so amusing."

"Do you find it amusing?"

"My dear fellow, *c'est à se tordre*. Don't you think so? Ah, it was high time I should meet you — I see. I have an idea you need me."

"Upon my word, I think I do!" Nick said, in a tone which struck his sister and made her wonder still more why, if the gentleman was so important as that, he did n't introduce him.

"There are many gods, and this is one of their temples," the mysterious personage went on. "It's a house of strange idols — is n't it? — and of some curious and unnatural sacrifices."

To Biddy, as much as to her brother, this remark appeared to be offered; but the girl's eyes

turned back to the ladies, who, for the moment, had lost their companion. She felt irresponsible and feared she should pass with this familiar cosmopolite for a stiff, scared English girl, which was not the type she aimed at ; but there seemed an interdiction even of ocular commerce so long as she had not a sign from Nick. The elder of the strange women had turned her back and was looking at some bronze figure, losing her shawl again as she did so ; but the other stood where their escort had quitted her, giving all her attention to his sudden sociability with others. Her arms hung at her sides, her head was bent, her face lowered, so that she had an odd appearance of raising her eyes from under her brows ; and in this attitude she was striking, though her air was unconciliatory, almost dangerous. Did it express resentment at having been abandoned for another girl? Biddy, who began to be frightened — there was a moment when the forsaken one resembled a tigress about to spring — was tempted to cry out that she had no wish whatever to appropriate the gentleman. Then she made the discovery that the young lady had a manner, almost as much as her cicerone, and the rapid induction that it perhaps meant no more than his. She only looked at Biddy from beneath her eyebrows, which were wonderfully arched, but there was a manner in the way she did it. Biddy had a momentary sense of being a figure in a ballet, a dramatic ballet — a subordinate, motionless figure,

to be dashed at, to music, or capered up to. It would be a very dramatic ballet indeed if this young person were the heroine. She had magnificent hair, the girl reflected; and at the same moment she heard Nick say to his interlocutor, "You're not in London—one can't meet you there?"

"I drift, I float," was the answer; "my feelings direct me—if such a life as mine may be said to have a direction. Where there's anything to feel I try to be there!" the young man continued, with his confiding laugh.

"I should like to get hold of you," Nick remarked.

"Well, in that case there would be something to feel. Those are the currents—any sort of personal relation—that govern my career."

"I don't want to lose you this time," Nick continued, in a manner that excited Biddy's surprise. A moment before, when his friend had said that he tried to be where there was anything to feel, she had wondered how he could endure him.

"Don't lose me, don't lose me!" exclaimed the stranger, with a countenance and a tone which affected the girl as the highest expression of irresponsibility that she had ever seen. "After all, why should you? Let us remain together, unless I interfere"—and he looked, smiling and interrogative, at Biddy, who still remained blank, only observing again that Nick forbore to make them acquainted. This was an anomaly, since he

prized the gentleman so; but there could be no anomaly of Nick's that would not impose itself upon his younger sister.

"Certainly, I keep you," said Nick, "unless, on my side, I deprive those ladies" —

"Charming women, but it's not an indissoluble union. We meet, we communicate, we part! They are going — I am seeing them to the door. I shall come back." With this Nick's friend rejoined his companions, who moved away with him, the strange, fine eyes of the girl lingering on Nick, as well as on Biddy, as they receded.

"Who is he — who are they?" Biddy instantly asked.

"He's a gentleman," Nick replied, unsatisfactorily, and even, as she thought, with a shade of hesitation. He spoke as if she might have supposed he was not one; and if he was really one why did n't he introduce him? But Biddy would not for the world have put this question to her brother, who now moved to the nearest bench and dropped upon it, as if to wait for the other's return. No sooner, however, had his sister seated herself than he said, "See here, my dear, do you think you had better stay?"

"Do you want me to go back to mother?" the girl asked, with a lengthening visage.

"Well, what do you think?" and Nick smiled down at her.

"Is your conversation to be about — about private affairs?"

"No, I can't say that. But I doubt whether mother would think it the sort of thing that's 'necessary to your development.' "

This assertion appeared to inspire Biddy with the eagerness with which again she broke out :
"But who are they — who are they ?"

"I know nothing of the ladies. I never saw them before. The man's a fellow I knew very well at Oxford. He was thought immense fun there. We have diverged, as he says, and I had almost lost sight of him, but not so much as he thinks, because I've read him, and read him with interest. He has written a very clever book."

"What kind of a book ?"

"A sort of a novel."

"What sort of a novel ?"

"Well, I don't know — with a lot of good writing." Biddy listened to this with so much interest that she thought it illogical her brother should add, "I dare say Peter will have come, if you return to mother."

"I don't care if he has. Peter's nothing to me. But I'll go if you wish it."

Nick looked down at her again, and then said, "It does n't signify. We'll all go."

"All ?" Biddy echoed.

"He won't hurt us. On the contrary, he'll do us good."

This was possible, the girl reflected in silence, but none the less the idea struck her as courageous — the idea of their taking the odd young

man back to breakfast with them and with the others, especially if Peter should be there. If Peter was nothing to her, it was singular she should have attached such importance to this contingency. The odd young man reappeared, and now that she saw him without his queer female appendages he seemed personally less unusual. He struck her, moreover, as generally a good deal accounted for by the literary character, especially if it were responsible for a lot of good writing. As he took his place on the bench Nick said to him, indicating her, "My sister Bridget," and then mentioned his name, "Mr. Gabriel Nash."

"You enjoy Paris—you are happy here?" Mr. Nash inquired, leaning over his friend to speak to the girl.

Though his words belonged to the situation it struck her that his tone did n't, and this made her answer him more dryly than she usually spoke. "Oh, yes, it's very nice."

"And French art interests you? You find things here that please?"

"Oh, yes, I like some of them."

Mr. Nash looked at her with kind eyes. "I hoped you would say you like the Academy better."

"She would if she did n't think you expected it," said Nicholas Dormer.

"Oh, Nick!" Biddy protested.

"Miss Dormer is herself an English picture,"

Gabriel Nash remarked, smiling like a man whose urbanity was a solvent.

"That's a compliment, if you don't like them!" Biddy exclaimed.

"Ah, some of them, some of them; there's a certain sort of thing!" Mr. Nash continued. "We must feel everything, everything that we can. We are here for that."

"You do like English art, then?" Nick demanded, with a slight accent of surprise.

Mr. Nash turned his smile upon him. "My dear Dormer, do you remember the old complaint I used to make of you? You had formulas that were like walking in one's hat. One may see something in a case, and one may not."

"Upon my word," said Nick, "I don't know any one who was fonder of a generalization than you. You turned them off as the man at the street-corner distributes handbills."

"They were my wild oats. I've sown them all."

"We shall see that!"

"Oh, they're nothing now — a tame, scanty, homely growth. My only generalizations are my actions."

"We shall see *them*, then."

"Ah, excuse me. You can't see them with the naked eye. Moreover, mine are principally negative. People's actions, I know, are, for the most part, the things they do, but mine are all the things I don't do. There are so many of those,

so many, but they don't produce any effect. And then all the rest are shades — extremely fine shades."

"Shades of behavior?" Nick inquired, with an interest which surprised his sister; Mr. Nash's discourse striking her mainly as the twaddle of the under-world.

"Shades of impression, of appreciation," said the young man, with his explanatory smile. "My only behavior is my feelings."

"Well, don't you show your feelings? You used to!"

"Was n't it mainly those of disgust?" Nash asked. "Those operate no longer. I have closed that window."

"Do you mean you like everything?"

"Dear me, no! But I look only at what I do like."

"Do you mean that you have lost the faculty of displeasure?"

"I have n't the least idea. I never try it. My dear fellow," said Gabriel Nash, "we have only one life that we know anything about: fancy taking it up with disagreeable impressions! When, then, shall we go in for the agreeable?"

"What do you mean by the agreeable?" Nick Dormer asked.

"Oh, the happy moments of our consciousness — the multiplication of those moments. We must save as many as possible from the dark gulf."

Nick had excited a certain astonishment on the part of his sister, but it was now Biddy's turn to make him open his eyes a little. She raised her sweet voice and inquired of Mr. Nash :—

“Don't you think there are any wrongs in the world — any abuses and sufferings?”

“Oh, so many, so many! That's why one must choose.”

“Choose to stop them, to reform them — is n't that the choice?” Biddy asked. “That's Nick's,” she added, blushing, and looking at this personage.

“Ah, our divergence — yes!” sighed Gabriel Nash. “There are all kinds of machinery for that — very complicated and ingenious. Your formulas, my dear Dormer, your formulas!”

“Hang 'em, I haven't got any!” Nick exclaimed.

“To me, personally, the simplest ways are those that appeal most,” Mr. Nash went on. “We pay too much attention to the ugly; we notice it, we magnify it. The great thing is to leave it alone and encourage the beautiful.”

“You must be very sure you get hold of the beautiful,” said Nick.

“Ah, precisely, and that's just the importance of the faculty of appreciation. We must train our special sense. It is capable of extraordinary extension. Life's none too long for that.”

“But what's the good of the extraordinary extension if there is no affirmation of it, if it all

goes to the negative, as you say? Where are the fine consequences?" Dormer asked.

"In one's own spirit. One is one's self a fine consequence. That's the most important one we have to do with. *I am a fine consequence,*" said Gabriel Nash.

Biddy rose from the bench at this, and stepped away a little, as if to look at a piece of statuary. But she had not gone far before, pausing and turning, she bent her eyes upon Mr. Nash with a heightened color, an air of hesitation and the question, after a moment, "Are you then an æsthete?"

"Ah, there's one of the formulas! That's walking in one's hat! I've *no* profession, my dear young lady. I've no *état civil*. These things are a part of the complicated, ingenious machinery. As I say, I keep to the simplest way. I find that gives one enough to do. Merely to be is such a *métier*; to live is such an art; to feel is such a career!"

Bridget Dormer turned her back and examined her statue, and her brother said to his old friend, "And to write?"

"To write? Oh, I'll never do it again!"

"You have done it almost well enough to be inconsistent. That book of yours is anything but negative; it's complicated and ingenious."

"My dear fellow, I'm extremely ashamed of it," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, call yourself a bloated Buddhist and have done with it!" his companion exclaimed.

"Have done with it? I haven't the least desire for that. And why should one call one's self anything? One only deprives other people of their dearest occupation. Let me add that you don't *begin* to have an insight into the art of life till it ceases to be of the smallest consequence to you what you may be called. That's rudimentary."

"But if you go in for shades, you must also go in for names. You must distinguish," Dormer objected. "The observer is nothing without his categories, his types and varieties."

"Ah, trust him to distinguish!" said Gabriel Nash, sweetly. "That's for his own convenience; he has, privately, a terminology to meet it. That's one's style. But from the moment it's for the convenience of others, the signs have to be grosser, the shades begin to go. That's a deplorable hour! Literature, you see, is for the convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays such mischief with one's style that really I have had to give it up."

"And politics?" Nick Dormer asked.

"Well, what about them?" was Mr. Nash's reply, in a peculiar intonation, as he watched his friend's sister, who was still examining her statue. Biddy was divided between irritation and curiosity. She had interposed space, but she had not gone beyond ear-shot. Nick's question made her curiosity throb, especially in its second form, as a rejoinder to their companion's.

"That, no doubt you'll say, is still far more for the convenience of others — is still worse for one's style."

Biddy turned round in time to hear Mr. Nash exclaim, "It has simply nothing in life to do with shades! I can't say worse for it than that."

Biddy stepped nearer at this, and, drawing still further on her courage, "Won't mamma be waiting? Ought n't we to go to luncheon?" she asked.

Both the young men looked up at her, and Mr. Nash remarked, —

"You ought to protest! You ought to save him!"

"To save him?" said Biddy.

"He *had* a style; upon my word, he had! But I've seen it go. I've read his speeches."

"You were capable of that?" Dormer demanded.

"For you, yes. But it was like listening to a nightingale in a brass band."

"I think they were beautiful," Biddy declared.

Her brother got up at this tribute, and Mr. Nash, rising too, said, with his bright, colloquial air, —

"But, Miss Dormer, he had eyes. He was made to see — to see all over, to see everything. There are so few like that."

"I think he still sees," Biddy rejoined, wondering a little why Nick did n't defend himself.

"He sees his side, dear young lady. Poor man,

fancy your having a 'side' — you, you — and spending your days and your nights looking at it! I'd as soon pass my life looking at an advertisement on a boarding."

"You don't see me some day a great statesman?" said Nick.

"My dear fellow, it's exactly what I've a terror of."

"Mercy! don't you admire them?" Biddy cried.

"It's a trade like another, and a method of making one's way which society certainly condones. But when one can be something better!"

"Dear me, what is better?" Biddy asked.

The young man hesitated, and Nick, replying for him, said —

"Gabriel Nash is better! You must come and lunch with us. I must keep you — I must!" he added.

"We shall save him yet," Mr. Nash observed genially to Biddy as they went, and the girl wondered still more what her mother would make of him.

III.

AFTER her companions left her, Lady Agnes rested for five minutes in silence with her elder daughter, at the end of which time she observed, "I suppose one must have food, at any rate," and, getting up, quitted the place where they had been sitting. "And where are we to go? I hate eating out-of-doors," she went on.

"Dear me, when one comes to Paris?" Grace rejoined, in a tone which appeared to imply that in so rash an adventure one must be prepared for compromises and concessions. The two ladies wandered to where they saw a large sign of "Buffet" suspended in the air, entering a precinct reserved for little white-clothed tables, straw-covered chairs, and long-aproned waiters. One of these functionaries approached them with eagerness, and with a "Mesdames sont seules?" receiving in return, from her ladyship, the slightly snappish announcement, "Non; nous sommes beaucoup!" He introduced them to a table larger than most of the others, and under his protection they took their places at it and began, rather languidly and vaguely, to consider the question of the repast. The waiter had placed a *carte* in Lady Agnes's hands, and she studied it,

through her eyeglass, with a failure of interest, while he enumerated, with professional fluency, the resources of the establishment, and Grace looked at the people at the other tables. She was hungry, and had already broken a morsel from a long glazed roll.

"Not cold beef and pickles, you know," she observed to her mother. Lady Agnes gave no heed to this profane remark, but she dropped her eyeglass and laid down the greasy document. "What does it signify? I dare say it's all nasty," Grace continued; and she added, inconsequently, "If Peter comes, he's sure to be particular."

"Let him be particular to come, first!" her ladyship exclaimed, turning a cold eye upon the waiter.

"Poulet chasseur, filets mignons, sauce béarnaise," the man suggested.

"You will give us what I tell you," said Lady Agnes, and she mentioned, with distinctness and authority, the dishes of which she desired that the meal should be composed. He interposed three or four more suggestions, but as they produced absolutely no impression on her he became silent and submissive, doing justice, apparently, to her ideas. For Lady Agnes had ideas; and though it had suited her humor, ten minutes before, to profess herself helpless in such a case, the manner in which she imposed them upon the waiter as original, practical and economical

showed the high, executive woman, the mother of children, the daughter of earls, the consort of an official, the dispenser of hospitality, looking back upon a lifetime of luncheons. She carried many cares, and the feeding of multitudes (she was honorably conscious of having fed them decently, as she had always done everything) had ever been one of them. "Everything is absurdly dear," she remarked to her daughter, as the waiter went away. To this remark Grace made no answer. She had been used, for a long time back, to hearing that everything was very dear; it was what one always expected. So she found the case herself, but she was silent and inventive about it.

Nothing further passed, in the way of conversation with her mother, while they waited for the latter's orders to be executed, till Lady Agnes reflected, audibly: "He makes me unhappy, the way he talks about Julia."

"Sometimes I think he does it to torment one. One can't mention her!" Grace responded.

"It's better not to mention her, but to leave it alone."

"Yet he never mentions her of himself."

"In some cases that is supposed to show that people like people — though of course something more than that is required," Lady Agnes continued to meditate. "Sometimes I think he's thinking of her; then at others I can't fancy *what* he's thinking of."

"It would be awfully suitable," said Grace, biting her roll.

Her mother was silent a moment, as if she were looking for some higher ground to put it upon. Then she appeared to find this loftier level in the observation. "Of course he must like her ; he has known her always."

"Nothing can be plainer than that she likes him," Grace declared.

"Poor Julia !" Lady Agnes exclaimed : and her tone suggested that she knew more about that than she was ready to state.

"It is n't as if she was n't clever and well read," her daughter went on. "If there were nothing else, there would be a reason in her being so interested in politics, in everything that he is."

"Ah, what he is — that's what I sometimes wonder !"

Grace Dormer looked at her mother a moment. "Why, mother, is n't he going to be like papa ?" She waited for an answer that did n't come ; after which she pursued, "I thought you thought him so like him already."

"Well, I don't," said Lady Agnes quietly.

"Who is, then ? Certainly Percy is n't."

Lady Agnes was silent a moment. "There is no one like your father."

"Dear papa !" Grace exclaimed. Then, with a rapid transition, "It would be so jolly for all of us ; she would be so nice to us."

"She is that already, in her way," said Lady Agnes, conscientiously, having followed the return, quick as it was. "Much good does it do her!" And she reproduced the note of her ejaculation of a moment before.

"It does her some, if one looks out for her. I do, and I think she knows it," Grace declared. "One can, at any rate, keep other women off."

"Don't meddle! you're very clumsy," was her mother's not particularly sympathetic rejoinder. "There are other women who are beautiful, and there are others who are clever and rich."

"Yes, but not all in one; that's what's so nice in Julia. Her fortune would be thrown in; he would n't appear to have married her for it."

"If he does, he won't," said Lady Agnes, a trifle obscurely.

"Yes, that's what's so charming. And he could do anything then, could n't he?"

"Well, your father had no fortune, to speak of."

"Yes, but did n't uncle Percy help him?"

"His wife helped him," said Lady Agnes.

"Dear mamma!" the girl exclaimed. "There's one thing," she added: "that Mr. Carteret will always help Nick."

"What do you mean by 'always'?"

"Why, whether he marries Julia or not."

"Things are not so easy," responded Lady Agnes. "It will all depend on Nick's behavior. He can stop it to-morrow."

Grace Dormer stared ; she evidently thought Mr. Carteret's beneficence a part of the scheme of nature. "How could he stop it?"

"By not being serious. It is n't so hard to prevent people giving you money."

"Serious?" Grace repeated. "Does he want him to be a prig, like Lord Egbert?"

"Yes, he does. And what he'll do for him he'll do for him only if he marries Julia."

"Has he told you?" Grace inquired. And then, before her mother could answer, she exclaimed, "I'm delighted at that!"

"He has n't told me, but that's the way things happen." Lady Agnes was less optimistic than her daughter, and such optimism as she cultivated was a thin tissue with the sense of things as they are showing through it. "If Nick becomes rich, Charles Carteret will make him more so. If he does n't, he won't give him a shilling."

"Oh, mamma!" Grace protested.

"It's all very well to say that in public life money is n't necessary, as it used to be," her ladyship went on, broodingly. "Those who say so don't know anything about it. It's always necessary."

Her daughter was visibly affected by the gloom of her manner, and felt impelled to evoke, as a corrective, a more cheerful idea. "I dare say ; but there's the fact — is n't there? — that poor papa had so little."

"Yes, and there's the fact that it killed him!"

These words came out with a strange, quick little flare of passion. They startled Grace Dormer, who jumped in her place, and cried, "Oh, mother!" The next instant, however, she added, in a different voice, "Oh, Peter!" for, with an air of eagerness, a gentleman was walking up to them.

"How d'ye do, cousin Agnes? How d'ye do, little Grace?" Peter Sherringham said, laughing and shaking hands with them; and three minutes later he was settled in his chair at their table, on which the first elements of the repast had been placed. Explanations, on one side and the other, were demanded and produced; from which it appeared that the two parties had been in some degree at cross-purposes. The day before Lady Agnes and her companions traveled to Paris, Sherringham had gone to London for forty-eight hours, on private business of the ambassador's, arriving, on his return by the night-train, only early that morning. There had accordingly been a delay in his receiving Nick Dormer's two notes. If Nick had come to the Embassy in person (he might have done him the honor to call), he would have learned that the second secretary was absent. Lady Agnes was not altogether successful in assigning a motive to her son's neglect of this courteous form; she said, "I expected him, I wanted him, to go; and indeed, not hearing from you, he would have gone immediately—an hour or two hence, on

leaving this place. But we are here so quietly, not to go out, not to seem to appeal to the ambassador. He said, 'Oh, mother, we'll keep out of it; a friendly note will do.' I don't know, definitely, what he wanted to keep out of, except it's anything like gayety. The Embassy is n't gay, I know. But I'm sure his note was friendly, was n't it? I dare say you'll see for yourself; he's different directly he gets abroad; he does n't seem to care." Lady Agnes paused a moment, not carrying out this particular elucidation; then she resumed: "He said you would have seen Julia, and that you would understand everything from her. And when I asked how she would know, he said, 'Oh, she knows everything!'"

"He never said a word to me about Julia," Peter Sherringham rejoined. Lady Agnes and her daughter exchanged a glance at this; the latter had already asked three times where Julia was, and her ladyship dropped that they had been hoping she would be able to come with Peter. The young man set forth that she was at that moment at an hotel in the Rue de la Paix, but had only been there since that morning; he had seen her before coming to the Champs Elysées. She had come up to Paris by an early train — she had been staying at Versailles, of all places in the world. She had been a week in Paris, on her return from Cannes (her stay *there* had been of nearly a month, — fancy !), and then had gone

out to Versailles to see Mrs. Billinghamurst. Perhaps they would remember her, poor Dallow's sister. She was staying there to teach her daughters French (she had a dozen or two !), and Julia had spent three days with her. She was to return to England about the 25th. It would make seven weeks that she would have been away from town — a rare thing for her ; she usually stuck to it so in summer.

"Three days with Mrs. Billinghamurst — how very good-natured of her !" Lady Agnes commented.

"Oh, they're very nice to her," Sherringham said.

"Well, I hope so !" Grace Dormer qualified. "Why did n't you make her come here ?"

"I proposed it, but she would n't." Another eye-beam, at this, passed between the two ladies, and Peter went on : "She said you must come and see her, at the Hôtel de Hollande."

"Of course we'll do that," Lady Agnes declared. "Nick went to ask about her at the Westminster."

"She gave that up ; they would n't give her the rooms she wanted, her usual set."

"She's delightfully particular !" Grace murmured. Then she added, "She *does* like pictures, does n't she ?"

Peter Sherringham stared. "Oh, I dare say. But that's not what she has in her head this morning. She has some news from London ; she's immensely excited."

"What has she in her head?" Lady Agnes asked.

"What's her news from London?" Grace demanded.

"She wants Nick to stand."

"Nick to stand?" both the ladies cried.

"She undertakes to bring him in for Harsh. Mr. Pinks is dead — the fellow, you know, that got the seat at the general election. He dropped down in London — disease of the heart, or something of that sort. Julia has her telegram, but I see it was in last night's papers."

"Imagine, Nick never mentioned it!" said Lady Agnes.

"Don't you know, mother? — abroad he only reads foreign papers."

"Oh, I know. I've no patience with him," her ladyship continued. "Dear Julia!"

"It's a nasty little place, and Pinks had a tight squeeze — 107, or something of that sort; but if it returned a Liberal a year ago, very likely it will do so again. Julia, at any rate, *se fait forte*, as they say here, to put him in."

"I'm sure if she can she will," Grace reflected.

"Dear, dear Julia! And Nick can do something for himself," said the mother of this candidate.

"I have no doubt he can do anything," Peter Sherringham returned, good-naturedly. Then, "Do you mean in expenses?" he inquired.

"Ah, I'm afraid he can't do much in expenses, poor dear boy! And it's dreadful, how little we can look to Percy."

"Well, I dare say you may look to Julia. I think that's her idea."

"Delightful Julia!" Lady Agnes ejaculated. "If poor Sir Nicholas could have known! Of course he must go straight home," she added.

"He won't like that," said Grace.

"Then he'll have to go without liking it."

"It will rather spoil *your* little excursion, if you've only just come," Peter suggested; "and the great Biddy's, if she's enjoying Paris."

"We may stay, perhaps — with Julia to protect us," said Lady Agnes.

"Ah, she won't stay; she'll go over for her man."

"Her man?"

"The fellow that stands, whoever he is; especially if he's Nick." These last words caused the eyes of Peter Sherringham's companions to meet again, and he went on: "She'll go straight down to Harsh."

"Wonderful Julia!" Lady Agnes panted. "Of course Nick must go straight there, too."

"Well, I suppose he must see first if they'll have him."

"If they'll have him? Why, how can he tell till he tries?"

"I mean the people at headquarters, the fellows who arrange it."

Lady Agnes colored a little. "My dear Peter, do you suppose there will be the least doubt of their 'having' the son of his father?"

"Of course it's a great name, cousin Agnes—a very great name."

"One of the greatest, simply," said Lady Agnes, smiling.

"It's the best name in the world!" Grace Dormer subjoined.

"All the same it did n't prevent his losing his seat."

"By half a dozen votes: it was too odious!" her ladyship cried.

"I remember—I remember. And in such a case as that why did n't they immediately put him in somewhere else?"

"How one sees that you live abroad, Peter! There happens to have been the most extraordinary lack of openings—I never saw anything like it—for a year. They've had their hand on him, keeping him all ready. I dare say they've telegraphed to him."

"And he has n't told you?"

Lady Agnes hesitated. "He's so odd when he's abroad!"

"At home, too, he lets things go," Grace interposed. "He does so little—takes no trouble." Her mother suffered this statement to pass unchallenged, and she pursued, philosophically, "I suppose it's because he knows he's so clever."

"So he is, dear old boy. But what does he do, what has he been doing, in a positive way?"

"He has been painting."

"Ah, not seriously!" Lady Agnes protested.

"That's the worst way," said Peter Sherringham. "Good things?"

Neither of the ladies made a direct response to this, but Lady Agnes said, "He has spoken repeatedly. They are always calling on him."

"He speaks magnificently," Grace attested.

"That's another of the things I lose, living in far countries. And he's doing the Salon, now, with great Biddy?"

"Just the things in this part. I can't think what keeps them so long," Lady Agnes rejoined. "Did you ever see such a dreadful place?"

Sherringham stared. "Are n't the things good? I had an idea" —

"Good?" cried Lady Agnes. "They're too odious, too wicked."

"Ah," said Peter, laughing, "that's what people fall into, if they live abroad. The French ought n't to live abroad!"

"Here they come," Grace announced, at this point; "but they've got a strange man with them."

"That's a bore, when we want to talk!" Lady Agnes sighed.

Peter got up, in the spirit of welcome, and stood a moment watching the others approach.

"There will be no difficulty in talking, to judge by the gentleman," he suggested; and while he remains so conspicuous our eyes may rest on him briefly. He was middling high and was visibly a representative of the nervous rather than of the phlegmatic branch of his race. He had an oval face, fine, firm features and a complexion that tended to the brown. Brown were his eyes, and women thought them soft; dark brown his hair, in which the same critics sometimes regretted the absence of a little undulation. It was perhaps to conceal this plainness that he wore it very short. His teeth were white; his moustache was pointed, and so was the small beard that adorned the extremity of his chin. His face expressed intelligence and was very much alive, and had the further distinction that it often struck superficial observers with a certain foreignness of cast. The deeper sort, however, usually perceived that it was English enough. There was an idea that, having taken up the diplomatic career and gone to live in strange lands, he cultivated the mask of an alien, an Italian or a Spaniard; of an alien in time, even — one of the wonderful ubiquitous diplomatic agents of the sixteenth century. In fact, it would have been impossible to be more modern than Peter Sherringham, and more of one's class and one's country. But this did not prevent a portion of the community — Bridget Dormer, for in-

stance — from admiring the hue of his cheek for its olive richness and his moustache and beard for their resemblance to those of Charles I. At the same time — she rather jumbled her comparisons — she thought he looked like a Titian.

IV.

PETER's meeting with Nick was of the friendliest on both sides, involving a great many "dear fellows" and "old boys," and his salutation to the younger of the Miss Dormers consisted of the frankest "Delighted to see you, my dear Bid!" There was no kissing, but there was cousinship in the air, of a conscious, living kind, as Gabriel Nash no doubt quickly perceived, hovering for a moment outside the group. Biddy said nothing to Peter Sherringham, but there was no flatness in a silence which afforded such opportunities for a pretty smile. Nick introduced Gabriel Nash to his mother and to the other two as "a delightful old friend," whom he had just come across, and Sherringham acknowledged the act by saying to Mr. Nash, but as if rather less for his sake than for that of the presenter, "I have seen you very often before."

"Ah, repetition — recurrence : we have n't yet, in the study of how to live, abolished that clumsiness, have we?" Mr. Nash genially inquired. "It's a poverty in the supernumeraries that we don't pass once for all, but come round and cross again, like a procession at the theatre. It's a shabby economy that ought to have been man-

aged better, The right thing would be just *one* appearance, and the procession, regardless of expense, forever and forever different."

The company was occupied in placing itself at table, so that the only disengaged attention, for the moment, was Grace's, to whom, as her eyes rested on him, the young man addressed these last words with a smile. "Alas, it's a very shabby idea, is n't it? The world is n't got up regardless of expense!"

Grace looked quickly away from him, and said to her brother, "Nick, Mr. Pinks is dead."

"Mr. Pinks?" asked Gabriel Nash, appearing to wonder where he should sit.

"The member for Harsh; and Julia wants you to stand," the girl went on.

"Mr. Pinks, the member for Harsh? What names, to be sure!" Gabriel mused cheerfully, still unseated.

"Julia wants me? I'm much obliged to her!" observed Nicholas Dormer. "Nash, please sit by my mother, with Peter on her other side."

"My dear, it is n't Julia," Lady Agnes remarked, earnestly, to her son. "Every one wants you. Haven't you heard from your people? Did n't you know the seat was vacant?"

Nick was looking round the table, to see what was on it. "Upon my word, I don't remember. What else have you ordered, mother?"

"There's some *bœuf braisé*, my dear, and afterwards some galantine. Here is a dish of eggs with asparagus-tips."

"I advise you to go in for it, Nick," said Peter Sherringham, to whom the preparation in question was presented.

"Into the eggs with asparagus-tips? Donnez m'en, s'il vous plait. My dear fellow, how can I stand? how can I sit? Where's the money to come from?"

"The money? Why from Jul—" Grace began, but immediately caught her mother's eye.

"Poor Julia, how you do work her!" Nick exclaimed. "Nash, I recommend you the asparagus-tips. Mother, he's my best friend; do look after him."

"I have an impression I have breakfasted — I am not sure," Nash observed.

"With those beautiful ladies? Try again; you'll find out."

"The money can be managed; the expenses are very small, and the seat is certain," Lady Agnes declared, not, apparently, heeding her son's injunction in respect to Nash.

"Rather — if Julia goes down!" her elder daughter exclaimed.

"Perhaps Julia won't go down!" Nick answered, humorously.

Biddy was seated next to Mr. Nash, so that she could take occasion to ask, "Who are the beautiful ladies?" as if she failed to recognize her brother's allusion. In reality this was an innocent trick: she was more curious than she could have given a suitable reason for about the

odd women from whom her neighbor had separated.

"Deluded, misguided, infatuated persons!" Gabriel Nash replied, understanding that she had asked for a description. "Strange, eccentric, almost romantic types. Predestined victims, simple-minded sacrificial lambs!"

This was copious, yet it was vague, so that Biddy could only respond, "Oh!" But meanwhile Peter Sherringham said to Nick, "Julia's here, you know. You must go and see her."

Nick looked at him for an instant rather hard, as if to say, "You too?" But Peter's eyes appeared to answer, "No, no, not I;" upon which his cousin rejoined, "Of course I'll go and see her. I'll go immediately. Please to thank her for thinking of me."

"Thinking of you? There are plenty to think of you!" Lady Agnes said. "There are sure to be telegrams at home. We must go back—we must go back!"

"We must go back to England?" Nick Dormer asked; and as his mother made no answer he continued, "Do you mean I must go to Harsh?"

Her ladyship evaded this question, inquiring of Mr. Nash if he would have a morsel of fish; but her gain was small, for this gentleman, struck again by the unhappy name of the bereaved constituency, only broke out, "Ah, what a place to represent! How can you—how can you?"

"It's an excellent place," said Lady Agnes, coldly. "I imagine you have never been there. It's a very good place indeed. It belongs very largely to my cousin, Mrs. Dallow."

Gabriel partook of the fish, listening with interest. "But I thought we had no more pocket-boroughs."

"It's pockets we rather lack, so many of us. There are plenty of Harshes," Nick Dormer observed.

"I don't know what you mean," Lady Agnes said to Gabriel, with considerable majesty.

Peter Sherringham also addressed him with an "Oh, it's all right; they come down on you like a shot!" and the young man continued ingenuously —

"Do you mean to say you have to pay to get into that place — that it's not *you* that are paid?"

"Into that place?" Lady Agnes repeated, blankly.

"Into the House of Commons. That you don't get a high salary?"

"My dear Nash, you're delightful: don't leave me — don't leave me!" Nick cried; while his mother looked at him with an eye that demanded, "Who is this extraordinary person?"

"What then did you think pocket-boroughs were?" Peter Sherringham asked.

Mr. Nash's facial radiance rested on him. "Why, boroughs that filled your pocket. To do

that sort of thing without a bribe — *c'est trop fort !*”

“He lives at Samarcand,” Nick Dormer explained to his mother, who colored perceptibly. “What do you advise me ? I’ll do whatever you say,” he went on to his old acquaintance.

“My dear — my dear !” Lady Agnes pleaded.

“See Julia first, with all respect to Mr. Nash. She’s of excellent counsel,” said Peter Sherringham.

Gabriel Nash smiled across the table at Dormer. “The lady first — the lady first ! I have not a word to suggest as against any idea of hers.”

“We must not sit here too long, there will be so much to do,” said Lady Agnes, anxiously, perceiving a certain slowness in the service of the *bœuf braisé*.

Biddy had been up to this moment mainly occupied in looking, covertly and at intervals, at Peter Sherringham ; as was perfectly lawful in a young lady with a handsome cousin whom she had not seen for more than a year. But her sweet voice now took license to throw in the words, “We know what Mr. Nash thinks of politics : he told us just now he thinks they are dreadful.”

“No, not dreadful — only inferior,” the personage impugned protested. “Everything is relative.”

“Inferior to what ?” Lady Agnes demanded.

Mr. Nash appeared to consider a moment. "To anything else that may be in question."

"Nothing else *is* in question!" said her ladyship, in a tone that would have been triumphant if it had not been dry.

"Ah, then!" And her neighbor shook his head sadly. He turned, after this, to Biddy, and said to her, "The ladies whom I was with just now, and in whom you were so good as to express an interest?" Biddy gave a sign of assent, and he went on: "They are persons theatrical; the younger one is trying to go upon the stage."

"And are you assisting her?" Biddy asked, pleased that she had guessed so nearly right.

"Not in the least — I'm rather heading her off. I consider it the lowest of the arts."

"Lower than politics?" asked Peter Sherringham, who was listening to this.

"Dear, no, I won't say that. I think the Théâtre Français a greater institution than the House of Commons."

"I agree with you there!" laughed Sherringham; "all the more that I don't consider the dramatic art a low one. On the contrary, it seems to me to include all the others."

"Yes — that's a view. I think it's the view of my friends."

"Of your friends?"

"Two ladies — old acquaintances — whom I met in Paris a week ago, and whom I have just been spending an hour with in this place."

"You should have seen them ; they struck me very much," Biddy said to her cousin.

"I should like to see them, if they really have anything to say to the theatre."

"It can easily be managed. Do you believe in the theatre?" asked Gabriel Nash.

"Passionately," Sherringham confessed. "Don't you?"

Before Nash had had time to answer, Biddy had interposed with a sigh: "How I wish I could go — but in Paris I can't!"

"I'll take you Biddy — I vow I'll take you."

"But the plays, Peter," the girl objected. "Mamma says they're worse than the pictures."

"Oh, we'll arrange that: they shall do one at the Français on purpose for a delightful little English girl."

"Can you make them?"

"I can make them do anything I choose."

"Ah, then, it's the theatre that believes in you," said Gabriel Nash.

"It would be ungrateful if it didn't!" Peter Sherringham laughed.

Lady Agnes had withdrawn herself from between him and Mr. Nash, and, to signify that she, at least, had finished eating, had gone to sit by her son, whom she held, with some importunity, in conversation. But hearing the theatre talked of, she threw across an impersonal challenge to the paradoxical young man. "Pray, should you think it better for a gentleman to be an actor?"

"Better than being a politician? Ah, comedian for comedian, is n't the actor more honest?"

Lady Agnes turned to her son and exclaimed with spirit, "Think of your great father, Nicholas!"

"He was an honest man; that perhaps is why he could n't stand it."

Peter Sherringham judged the colloquy to have taken an uncomfortable twist, though not wholly, as it seemed to him, by the act of Nick's queer comrade. To draw it back to safer ground he said to this personage: "May I ask if the ladies you just spoke of are English — Mrs. and Miss Rooth: is n't that the rather odd name?"

"The very same. Only the daughter, according to her kind, desires to be known by some *nom de guerre* before she has even been able to enlist."

"And what does she call herself?" Bridget Dormer asked.

"Maud Vavasour, or Edith Temple, or Gladys Vane — some rubbish of that sort."

"What, then, is her own name?"

"Miriam — Miriam Rooth. It would do very well and would give her the benefit of the prepossessing fact that (to the best of my belief, at least) she is more than half a Jewess."

"It is as good as Rachel Félix," Sherringham said.

"The name's as good, but not the talent. The girl is magnificently stupid."

"And more than half a Jewess? Don't you believe it!" Sherringham exclaimed.

"Don't believe she's a Jewess?" Biddy asked, still more interested in Miriam Rooth.

"No, no — that she's stupid, really. If she is, she'll be the first."

"Ah, you may judge for yourself," Nash rejoined, "if you'll come to-morrow afternoon to Madame Carré, Rue de Constantinople, à l'entresol."

"Madame Carré? Why, I've already a note from her — I found it this morning on my return to Paris — asking me to look in at five o'clock and listen to a *jeune Anglaise*."

"That's my arrangement — I obtained the favor. The ladies want an opinion, and dear old Carré has consented to see them and to give one. Gladys will recite something and the venerable artist will pass judgment."

Sherringham remembered that he had his note in his pocket, and he took it out and looked it over. "She wishes to make her a little audience — she says she'll do better with that — and she asks me because I'm English. I shall make a point of going."

"And bring Dormer if you can: the audience will be better. Will you come, Dormer?" Mr. Nash continued, appealing to his friend, — "will you come with me to see an old French actress and to hear an English amateur recite?"

Nick looked round from his talk with his mo-

ther and Grace. "I'll go anywhere with you, so that, as I've told you, I may not lose sight of you, may keep hold of you."

"Poor Mr. Nash, why is he so useful?" Lady Agnes demanded with a laugh.

"He steadies me, mother."

"Oh, I wish you'd take me, Peter," Biddy broke out, wistfully, to her cousin.

"To spend an hour with an old French actress? Do you want to go upon the stage?" the young man inquired.

"No, but I want to see something, to know something."

"Madame Carré is wonderful in her way, but she is hardly company for a little English girl."

"I'm not little, I'm only too big; and *she* goes, the person you speak of."

"For a professional purpose, and with her good mother," smiled Gabriel Nash. "I think Lady Agnes would hardly venture" —

"Oh, I've seen her good mother!" said Biddy, as if she had an impression of what the worth of that protection might be.

"Yes, but you have n't heard her. It's then that you measure her."

Biddy was wistful still. "Is it the famous Honorine Carré, the great celebrity?"

"Honorine in person: the incomparable, the perfect!" said Peter Sherringham. "The first artist of our time, taking her altogether. She and I are old pals; she has been so good as to

come and 'say' things, as she does sometimes still *dans le monde*, as no one else does, in my rooms."

"Make her come, then ; we can go *there* !"

"One of these days !"

"And the young lady — Miriam, Edith, Gladys — make her come too."

Sherringham looked at Nash and the latter exclaimed, "Oh, you'll have no difficulty ; she'll jump at it !"

"Very good ; I'll give a little artistic tea, with Julia, too, of course. And you must come, Mr. Nash." This gentleman promised, with an inclination, and Peter continued : "But if, as you say, you're not for helping the young lady, how came you to arrange this interview with the great model ?"

"Precisely to stop her. The great model will find her very bad. Her judgments, as you probably know, are Rhadamanthine."

"Poor girl !" said Biddy. "I think you're cruel."

"Never mind ; I'll look after them," said Sherringham.

"And how can Madame Carré judge, if the girl recites English ?"

"She's so intelligent that she could judge if she recited Chinese," Peter declared.

"That's true, but the *jeune Anglaise* recites also in French," said Gabriel Nash.

"Then she is n't stupid."

"And in Italian, and in several more tongues, for aught I know."

Sherringham was visibly interested. "Very good ; we'll put her through them all."

"She must be *most* clever," Biddy went on, yearningly.

"She has spent her life on the Continent ; she has wandered about with her mother ; she has picked up things."

"And is she a lady ?" Biddy asked.

"Oh, tremendous ! The great ones of the earth on the mother's side. On the father's, on the other hand, I imagine, only a Jew stockbroker in the city."

"Then they're rich - or ought to be," Sherringham suggested.

"Ought to be — an, there's the bitterness ! The stockbroker had too short a go — he was carried off in his flower. However, he left his wife a certain property, which she appears to have muddled away, not having the safeguard of being herself a Hebrew. This is what she lived upon till to-day — this and another resource. Her husband, as she has often told me, had the artistic temperament ; that's common, as you know, among *ces messieurs*. He made the most of his little opportunities and collected various pictures, tapestries, enamels, porcelains and similar gewgaws. He parted with them also, I gather, at a profit ; in short, he carried on a neat little business as a *brocanteur*. It was nipped in the

bud, but Mrs. Rooth was left with a certain number of these articles in her hands; indeed they must have constituted the most palpable part of her heritage. She was not a woman of business; she turned them, no doubt, to indifferent account; but she sold them piece by piece, and they kept her going while her daughter grew up. It was to this precarious traffic, conducted with extraordinary mystery and delicacy, that, five years ago, in Florence, I was indebted for my acquaintance with her. In those days I used to collect — heaven help me! — I used to pick up rubbish which I could ill afford. It was a little phase — we have our little phases, haven't we?" asked Gabriel Nash, with childlike trust — "and I have come out on the other side. Mrs. Rooth had an old green pot, and I heard of her old green pot. To hear of it was to long for it, so that I went to see it, under cover of night. I bought it, and a couple of years ago I overturned it and smashed it. It was the last of the little phase. It was not, however, as you have seen, the last of Mrs. Rooth. I saw her afterwards in London, and I met her a year or two ago, in Venice. She appears to be a great wanderer. She had other old pots, of other colors, red, yellow, black, or blue — she could produce them of any complexion you liked. I don't know whether she carried them about with her or whether she had little secret stores in the principal cities of Europe. To-day, at any rate, they seem all gone. On the other

hand, she has her daughter, who has grown up and who is a precious vase of another kind — less fragile, I hope, than the rest. May she not be overturned and smashed !”

Peter Sherringham and Biddy Dormer listened with attention to this history, and the girl testified to the interest with which she had followed it by saying, when Mr. Nash had ceased speaking, “A Jewish stockbroker, a dealer in curiosities : what an odd person to marry — for a person who was well born ! I dare say he was a German.”

“His name must have been simply Roth, and the poor lady, to smarten it up, has put in another *o*,” Sherringham ingeniously suggested.

“You are both very clever,” said Gabriel Nash, “and Rudolf Roth, as I happen to know, was indeed the designation of Maud Vavasour’s papa. But, as far as the question of derogation goes, one might as well drown as starve, for what connection is *not* a misalliance when one happens to have the cumbersome, the unaccommodating honor of being a Neville-Nugent of Castle Nugent ? Such was the high lineage of Maud’s mamma. I seem to have heard it mentioned that Rudolf Roth was very versatile and, like most of his species, not unacquainted with the practice of music. He had been employed to teach the harmonium to Miss Neville-Nugent and she had profited by his lessons. If his daughter is like him — and she is not like her mother — he was darkly and danger-

ously handsome. So I venture rapidly to reconstruct the situation."

A silence, for the moment, had fallen upon Lady Agnes and her other two children, so that Mr. Nash, with his universal urbanity, practically addressed these last remarks to them as well as to his other auditors. Lady Agnes looked as if she wondered whom he was talking about, and having caught the name of a noble residence she inquired —

"Castle Nugent — where is that?"

"It's a domain of immeasurable extent and almost inconceivable splendor, but I fear it is n't to be found in any prosaic earthly geography!" Lady Agnes rested her eyes on the tablecloth, as if she were not sure a liberty had not been taken with her, and while Mr. Nash continued to abound in descriptive suppositions — "It must be on the banks of the Manzanares or the Guadalquivir" — Peter Sherringham, whose imagination appeared to have been strongly kindled by the sketch of Miriam Rooth, challenging him sociably, reminded him that he had, a short time before, assigned a low place to the dramatic art and had not yet answered his question as to whether he believed in the theatre. This gave Nash an opportunity to go on:

"I don't know that I understand your question; there are different ways of taking it. Do I think it's important? Is that what you mean? Important, certainly, to managers and stage-car-

penters who want to make money, to ladies and gentlemen who want to produce themselves in public by lime-light, and to other ladies and gentlemen who are bored and stupid and don't know what to do with their evening. It's a commercial and social convenience which may be infinitely worked. But important artistically, intellectually? How *can* it be — so poor, so limited a form?"

"Dear me, it strikes me as so rich, so various! Do *you* think it's poor and limited, Nick?" Sherringham added, appealing to his kinsman.

"I think whatever Nash thinks. I have no opinion to-day but his."

This answer of Nick Dormer's drew the eyes of his mother and sisters to him and caused his friend to exclaim that he was not used to such responsibilities, so few people had ever tested his presence of mind by agreeing with him.

"Oh, I used to be of your way of feeling," Nash said to Sherringham. "I understand you perfectly. It's a phase like another. I've been through it — *j'ai été comme ça*."

"And you went, then, very often to the Théâtre Français, and it was there I saw you. I place you now."

"I'm afraid I noticed none of the other spectators," Nash explained. "I had no attention but for the great Carré — she was still on the stage. Judge of my infatuation, and how I can allow for yours, when I tell you that I sought her

acquaintance, that I could n't rest till I had told her that I hung upon her lips."

"That 's just what *I* told her," returned Sherringham.

"She was very kind to me. She said, 'Vous me rendez des forces.'"

"That 's just what she said to me!"

"And we have remained very good friends."

"So have we!" laughed Sherringham. "And such perfect art as hers: do you mean to say you don't consider *that* important — such a rare dramatic intelligence?"

"I 'm afraid you read the *feuilletons*. You catch their phrases," Gabriel Nash blandly rejoined. "Dramatic intelligence is never rare; nothing is more common."

"Then why have we so many bad actors?"

"Have we? I thought they were mostly good; succeeding more easily and more completely in that business than in anything else. What could they do — those people, generally — if they did n't do that? And reflect that *that* enables them to succeed! Of course, always, there are numbers of people on the stage who are no actors at all, for it's even easier to our poor humanity to be ineffectively stupid and vulgar than to bring down the house."

"It's not easy, by what I can see, to produce, completely, any artistic effect," Sherringham declared; "and those that the actor produces are among the most moving that we know. You 'll

not persuade me that to watch such an actress as Madame Carré was not an education of the taste, an enlargement of one's knowledge."

"She did what she could, poor woman, but in what belittling, coarsening conditions! She had to interpret a character in a play, and a character in a play (not to say the whole piece — I speak more particularly of modern pieces) is such a wretchedly small peg to hang anything on! The dramatist shows us so little, is so hampered by his audience, is restricted to so poor an analysis."

"I know the complaint. It's all the fashion now. The *raffinés* despise the theatre," said Peter Sherringham, in the manner of a man abreast with the culture of his age and not to be captured by a surprise. "*Connu, connu!*"

"It will be known better yet, won't it? when the essentially brutal nature of the modern audience is still more perceived, when it has been properly analyzed: the *omnium gatherum* of the population of a big commercial city, at the hour of the day when their taste is at its lowest, flocking out of hideous hotels and restaurants, gorged with food, stultified with buying and selling and with all the other sordid preoccupations of the day, squeezed together in a sweltering mass, disappointed in their seats, timing the author, timing the actor, wishing to get their money back on the spot, before eleven o'clock. Fancy putting the exquisite before such a tribunal as that! There's not even a question of it. The dramatist would n't

if he could, and in nine cases out of ten he could n't if he would. He has to make the basest concessions. One of his principal canons is that he must enable his spectators to catch the suburban trains, which stop at 11:30. What would you think of any other artist—the painter or the novelist—whose governing forces should be the dinner and the suburban trains? The old dramatists did n't defer to them (not so much, at least), and that's why they are less and lessactable. If they are touched—the large fellows—it's only to be mutilated and trivialized. Besides, they had a simpler civilization to represent—societies in which the life of man was in action, in passion, in immediate and violent expression. Those things could be put upon the playhouse boards with comparatively little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. To-day we are so infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference. What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared with what the novelist does!"

"Do you write novels, Mr. Nash?" Peter demanded.

"No, but I read them when they are extraordinarily good, and I don't go to plays. I read Balzac, for instance—I encounter the magnifi-

cent portrait of Valérie Marneffe, in 'La Cousine Bette.'"

"And you contrast it with the poverty of Emile Augier's Séraphine in 'Les Lionnes Pauvres'? I was awaiting you there. That's the *cheval de bataille* of you fellows."

"What an extraordinary discussion! What dreadful authors!" Lady Agnes murmured to her son. But he was listening so attentively to the other young men that he made no response, and Peter Sherringham went on :

"I have seen Madame Carré in parts, in the modern repertory, which she has made as vivid to me, caused to abide as ineffaceably in my memory, as Valérie Marneffe. She is the Balzac, as one may say, of actresses."

"The miniaturist, as it were, of whitewashers!" Nash rejoined, laughing.

It might have been guessed that Sherringham was irritated, but the other disputant was so good-humored that he abundantly recognized his own obligation to appear so.

"You would be magnanimous if you thought the young lady you have introduced to our old friend would be important."

"She might be much more so than she ever will be."

Lady Agnes got up, to terminate the scene, and even to signify that enough had been said about people and questions she had never heard of. Every one else rose, the waiter brought

Nicholas the receipt of the bill, and Sherringham went on, to his interlocutor —

“Perhaps she will be more so than you think.”

“Perhaps — if *you* take an interest in her !”

“A mystic voice seems to exhort me to do so, to whisper that, though I have never seen her, I shall find something in her. What do you say, Biddy, shall I take an interest in her ?”

Biddy hesitated a moment, colored a little, felt a certain embarrassment in being publicly treated as an oracle.

“If she’s not nice I don’t advise it.”

“And if she *is* nice ?”

“You advise it still less !” her brother exclaimed, laughing and putting his arm round her.

Lady Agnes looked sombre — she might have been saying to herself, “Dear me, what chance has a girl of mine with a man who’s so agog about actresses ?” She was disconcerted and distressed ; a multitude of incongruous things, all the morning, had been forced upon her attention — displeasing pictures and still more displeasing theories about them, vague portents of perversity on the part of Nicholas, and a strange eagerness on Peter’s, learned apparently in Paris, to discuss, with a person who had a tone she never had been exposed to, topics irrelevant and uninteresting, the practical effect of which was to make light of her presence. “Let us leave this — let us leave this !” she almost moaned. The party moved

together toward the door of departure, and her ruffled spirit was not soothed by hearing her son remark to his terrible friend, "You know you don't leave us — I stick to you!"

At this Lady Agnes broke out and interposed, "Excuse me for reminding you that you are going to call on Julia."

"Well, can't Nash also come to call on Julia? That's just what I want — that she should see him."

Peter Sherringham came humanely to her ladyship's assistance. "A better way, perhaps, will be for them to meet under my auspices, at my 'dramatic tea.' This will enable me to return one favor for another. If Mr. Nash is so good as to introduce me to this aspirant for honors we estimate so differently, I will introduce him to my sister, a much more positive quantity."

"It is easy to see who'll have the best of it!" Grace Dormer exclaimed; and Gabriel Nash stood there serenely, impartially, in a graceful, detached way which seemed characteristic of him, assenting to any decision that relieved him of the grossness of choice and generally confident that things would turn out well for him. He was cheerfully helpless and sociably indifferent; ready to preside, with a smile, even at a discussion of his own admissibility.

"Nick will bring you. I have a little corner at the Embassy," Sherringham continued.

"You are very kind. You must bring him, then, to-morrow — Rue de Constantinople."

"At five o'clock — don't be afraid."

"Oh, dear!" said Bidly, as they went on again ; and Lady Agnes, seizing his arm, marched off more quickly with her son. When they came out into the Champs Elysées Nick Dormer, looking round, saw that his friend had disappeared. Bidly had attached herself to Peter, and Grace, apparently, had not encouraged Mr. Nash.

V.

LADY AGNES'S idea had been that her son should go straight from the Palais de l'Industrie to the Hôtel de Hollande, with or without his mother and his sisters, as his humor should seem to recommend. Much as she desired to see their brilliant kinswoman, and as she knew that her daughters desired it, she was quite ready to postpone their visit, if this sacrifice should contribute to a speedy confrontation for Nick. She was eager that he should talk with Mrs. Dallow, and eager that he should be eager himself ; but it presently appeared that he was really not anything that could impartially be called so. His view was that she and the girls should go to the Hôtel de Hollande without delay, and should spend the rest of the day with Julia, if they liked. He would go later ; he would go in the evening. There were lots of things he wanted to do meanwhile.

This question was discussed with some intensity, though not at length, while the little party stood on the edge of the Place de la Concorde, to which they had proceeded on foot ; and Lady Agnes noticed that the "lots of things" to which he proposed to give precedence over an urgent

duty, a conference with a person who held out full hands to him, were implied somehow in the friendly glance with which he covered the great square, the opposite bank of the Seine, the steep blue roofs of the quay, the bright immensity of Paris. What in the world could be more important than making sure of his seat? — so quickly did the good lady's imagination travel. And now that idea appealed to him less than a ramble in search of old books and prints, for she was sure this was what he had in his head. Julia would be flattered if she knew it, but of course she must not know it. Lady Agnes was already thinking of the most honorable explanations she could give of the young man's want of precipitation. She would have liked to represent him as tremendously occupied, in his room at their own hotel, in getting off political letters to every one it should concern, and particularly in drawing up his address to the electors of Harsh. Fortunately she was a woman of innumerable discretions, and a part of the worn look that sat in her face came from her having schooled herself for years, in her relations with her husband and her sons, not to insist unduly. She would have liked to insist, nature had formed her to insist, and the self-control had told in more ways than one. Even now it was powerless to prevent her suggesting that before doing anything else Nick should at least repair to the inn and see if there were not some telegrams.

He freely consented to do so much as this, and having called a cab, that she might go her way with the girls, he kissed her again, as he had done at the exhibition. This was an attention that could never displease her, but somehow when he kissed her often her anxiety was apt to increase: she had come to recognize it as a sign that he was slipping away from her. She drove off with a vague sense that at any rate she and the girls might do something toward keeping the place warm for him. She had been a little vexed that Peter had not administered more of a push toward the Hôtel de Hollande, clear as it had become to her now that there was a foreignness in Peter which was not to be counted on, and which made him speak of English affairs and even of English domestic politics as local. Of course they were local, and was not that the warm human comfort of them? As she left the two young men standing together in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, the grand composition of which Nick, as she looked back, appeared to have paused to admire (as if he had not seen it a thousand times!), she wished she might have thought of Peter's influence with her son as exerted a little more in favor of localism. She had a sense that he would not abbreviate the boy's ill-timed *flânerie*. However, he had been very nice: he had invited them all to dine with him that evening at a convenient restaurant, promising to bring Julia and one of his colleagues. So much

as this he had been willing to do to make sure that Nick and his sister should meet. His want of localism, moreover, was not so great as that if it should turn out that there *was* anything beneath his manner toward Biddy — ! The conclusion of this reflection is, perhaps, best indicated by the circumstance of her ladyship's remarking, after a minute, to her younger daughter, who sat opposite to her in the *voiture de place*, that it would do no harm if she should get a new hat, and that the article might be purchased that afternoon.

"A French hat, mamma?" said Grace. "Oh, do wait till she gets home!"

"I think they are prettier here, you know," Biddy rejoined; and Lady Agnes said, simply, "I dare say they're cheaper." What was in her mind, in fact, was, "I dare say Peter thinks them becoming." It will be seen that she had plenty of spiritual occupation, the sum of which was not diminished by her learning, when she reached the top of the Rue de la Paix, that Mrs. Dallow had gone out half an hour before and had left no message. She was more disconcerted by this incident than she could have explained or than she thought was right, for she had taken for granted that Julia would be in a manner waiting for them. How did she know that Nick was not coming? When people were in Paris for a few days they did n't mope in the house; but Julia might have waited a little longer or might have left an explanation. Was she then not so much in earnest

about Nick's standing? Did n't she recognize the importance of being there to see him about it? Lady Agnes wondered whether Julia's behavior were a sign that she was already tired of the way this young gentleman treated her. Perhaps she had gone out because an instinct told her that its being important he should see her early would make no difference with him — told her that he would n't come. Her heart sank as she glanced at this possibility that Julia was already tired, for she, on her side, had an instinct there were still more tiresome things in store. She had disliked having to tell Mrs. Dallow that Nick would n't see her till the evening, but now she disliked still more her not being there to hear it. She even resented a little her kinswoman's not having reasoned that she and the girls would come in any event, and not thought them worth staying in for. It occurred to her that she would, perhaps, have gone to their hotel, which was a good way up the Rue de Rivoli, near the Palais Royal, and she directed the cabman to drive to that establishment.

As he jogged along, she took in some degree the measure of what that might mean, Julia's seeking a little to avoid them. Was she growing to dislike them? Did she think they kept too sharp an eye on her, so that the idea of their standing in a still closer relation to her would not be enticing? Her conduct up to this time had not worn such an appearance, unless, perhaps,

a little, just a very little, in the matter of poor Grace. Lady Agnes knew that she was not particularly fond of poor Grace, and was even able to guess the reason — the manner in which Grace betrayed the most that they wanted to make sure of her. She remembered how long the girl had stayed the last time she had gone to Harsh. She had gone for an acceptable week, and she had been in the house a month. She took a private, heroic vow that Grace should not go near the place again for a year ; that is, not unless Nick and Julia were married before this. If that were to happen, she should n't care. She recognized that it was not absolutely everything that Julia should be in love with Nick ; it was also better she should dislike his mother and sisters after than before. Lady Agnes did justice to the natural rule in virtue of which it usually comes to pass that a woman does n't get on with her husband's female belongings, and was even willing to be sacrificed to it in her disciplined degree. But she desired not to be sacrificed for nothing : if she was to be objected to as a mother-in-law, she wished to be the mother-in-law first.

At the hotel in the Rue de Rivoli she had the disappointment of finding that Mrs. Dallow had not called, and also that no telegrams had come. She went in with the girls for half an hour, and then she straggled out with them again. She was undetermined and dissatisfied, and the afternoon was rather a problem ; of the kind, moreover,

that she disliked most and was least accustomed to : not a choice between different things to do (her life had been full of that), but a want of anything to do at all. Nick had said to her before they separated, " You can knock about with the girls, you know ; everything is amusing here." That was easily said, while he sauntered and gossiped with Peter Sherringham and perhaps went to see more pictures like those in the Salon. He was usually, on such occasions, very good-natured about spending his time with them ; but this episode had taken altogether a perverse, profane form. She had no desire whatever to knock about, and she was far from finding everything in Paris amusing. She had no aptitude for aimlessness, and, moreover, she thought it vulgar. If she had found Julia's card at the hotel (the sign of a hope of catching them just as they came back from the Salon), she would have made a second attempt to see her before the evening ; but now certainly they would leave her alone. Lady Agnes wandered joylessly with the girls in the Palais Royal and the Rue de Richelieu, and emerged upon the Boulevard, where they continued their frugal prowl, as Biddy rather irritatingly called it. They went into five shops to buy a hat for Biddy, and her ladyship's presuppositions of cheapness were wofully belied.

" Who in the world is your funny friend ? " Peter Sherringham asked of his kinsman, without loss of time, as they walked together.

"Ah, there's something else you lost by going to Cambridge — you lost Gabriel Nash!"

"He sounds like an Elizabethan dramatist," Sherringham said. "But I haven't lost him, since it appears now that I shall not be able to have you without him."

"Oh, as for that, wait a little. I'm going to try him again, but I don't know how he wears. What I mean is that you have probably lost his freshness. I have an idea he has become conventional, or at any rate serious."

"Bless me, do you call that serious?"

"He used to be so gay. He had a real genius for suggestive paradox. He was a wonderful talker."

"It seems to me he does very well now," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh, this is nothing. He had great flights of old, very great flights; one saw him rise and rise, and turn somersaults in the blue, and wondered how far he could go. He's very intelligent, and I should think it might be interesting to find out what it is that prevents the whole man from being as good as his parts. I mean in case he is n't so good."

"I see you more than suspect that. May it not simply be that he's an ass?"

"That would be the whole — I shall see in time — but it certainly is n't one of the parts. It may be the effect, but it is n't the cause, and it's for the cause that I claim an interest. I imagine you

think he's an ass on account of what he said about the theatre, his pronouncing it a coarse art."

"To differ about him that reason will do," said Sherringham. "The only bad one would be one that should n't preserve our difference. You need n't tell me you agree with him, for, frankly, I don't care."

"Then your passion still burns?" Nick Dormer asked.

"My passion?"

"I don't mean for any individual exponent of the contestable art: mark the guilty conscience, mark the rising blush, mark the confusion of mind! I mean the old sign one knew you best by: your permanent stall at the Français, your inveterate attendance at *premières*, the way you 'follow' the young talents and the old."

"Yes, it's still my little hobby; my little folly, if you like. I don't see that I get tired of it. What will you have? Strong predilections are rather a blessing; they are simplifying. I am fond of representation — the representation of life: I like it better, I think, than the real thing. You like it, too, so you have no right to cast the stone. You like it best done one way and I another; and our preference, on either side, has a deep root in us. There is a fascination to me in the way the actor does it, when his talent (ah, he must have that!) has been highly trained (ah, it must *be* that!). The things he can do, in this effort at representation (with the dramatist to

give him his lift) seem to me innumerable — he can carry it to a delicacy! — and I take great pleasure in observing them, in recognizing them and comparing them. It's an amusement like another: I don't pretend to call it by any exalted name; but in this vale of friction it will serve. One can lose one's self in it, and it has this recommendation (in common, I suppose, with the study of the other arts), that the further you go in it the more you find. So I go rather far, if you will. But is it the principal sign one knows me by?" Sherringham abruptly asked.

"Don't be ashamed of it, or it will be ashamed of you. I ought to discriminate. You are distinguished among my friends and relations by being a rising young diplomatist; but you know I always want the further distinction, the last analysis. Therefore I surmise that you are conspicuous among rising young diplomatists for the infatuation that you describe in such pretty terms."

"You evidently believe that it will prevent me from rising very high. But pastime for pastime, is it any idler than yours?"

"Than mine?"

"Why, you have half a dozen, while I only allow myself the luxury of one. For the theatre is my sole vice, really. Is this more wanton, say, than to devote weeks to ascertaining in what particular way your friend Mr. Nash may be a twaddler? That's not my ideal of choice recreation,

but I would undertake to do it sooner. You're a young statesman (who happens to be *en disponibilité* for the moment), but you spend not a little of your time in besmearing canvas with bright-colored pigments. The idea of representation fascinates you, but in your case it's representation in oils — or do you practice water-colors, too? You even go much further than I, for I study my art of predilection only in the works of others. I don't aspire to leave works of my own. You're a painter, possibly a great one; but I'm not an actor." Nick Dormer declared that he would certainly become one — he was on the way to it; and Sherringham, without heeding this charge, went on: "Let me add that, considering you *are* a painter, your portrait of the complicated Nash is lamentably dim."

"He's not at all complicated; he's only too simple to give an account of. Most people have a lot of attributes and appendages that dress them up and superscribe them, and what I like him for is that he has n't any at all. It makes him so cool."

"By Jove, you match him there! It's an attribute to be tolerated. How does he manage it?"

"I have n't the least idea — I don't know that he *is* tolerated. I don't think any one has ever detected the process. His means, his profession, his belongings, have never anything to do with the question. He does n't shade off into other

people ; he's as neat as an outline cut out of paper with scissors. I like him, therefore, because in intercourse with him you know what you've got hold of. With most men you don't : to pick the flower you must break off the whole dusty, thorny, worldly branch ; you find you are taking up in your grasp all sorts of other people and things, dangling accidents and conditions. Poor Nash has none of those ramifications : he's the solitary blossom."

"My dear fellow, you would be better for a little of the same pruning!" Sherringham exclaimed ; and the young men continued their walk and their gossip, jerking each other this way and that with a sociable roughness consequent on their having been boys together. Intimacy had reigned, of old, between the little Sherringshams and the little Dormers, united by country contiguity and by the circumstance that there was first cousinship, not neglected, among the parents, Lady Agnes standing in this convertible relation to Lady Windrush, the mother of Peter and Julia, as well as of other daughters and of a maturer youth who was to inherit, and who since then had inherited, the ancient barony. Since then many things had altered, but not the deep foundation of sociability. One of our young men had gone to Eton and the other to Harrow (the scattered school on the hill was the tradition of the Dormers), and the divergence had taken its course later, in university years. Bricket,

however, had remained accessible to Windrush, and Windrush to Bricket, to which Percival Dormer had now succeeded, terminating the interchange a trifle rudely by letting out that pleasant white house in the midlands (its expropriated inhabitants, Lady Agnes and her daughters, adored it) to an American reputed rich, who, in the first flush of international comparison, considered that for twelve hundred a year he got it at a bargain. Bricket had come to the late Sir Nicholas from his elder brother, who died wifeless and childless. The new baronet, so different from his father (though he recalled at some points the uncle after whom he had been named) that Nick had to make it up by aspirations of resemblance, roamed about the world, taking shots which excited the enthusiasm of society, when society heard of them, at the few legitimate creatures of the chase which the British rifle had spared. Lady Agnes, meanwhile, settled with her girls in a gabled, latticed house in a creditable quarter, though it was still a little raw, of the temperate zone of London. It was not into her lap, poor woman, that the revenues of Bricket were poured. There was no dower-house attached to that moderate property, and the allowance with which the estate was charged on her ladyship's behalf was not an incitement to grandeur.

Nick had a room under his mother's roof, which he mainly used to dress for dinner when he dined in Calcutta Gardens, and he had "kept on" his

chambers in the Temple ; for to a young man in public life an independent address was indispensable. Moreover, he was suspected of having a studio in an out-of-the-way quarter of the town, the indistinguishable parts of South Kensington, incongruous as such a retreat might seem in the case of a member of Parliament. It was an absurd place to see his constituents, unless he wanted to paint their portraits, a kind of representation with which they scarcely would have been satisfied ; and in fact the only question of portraiture had been when the wives and daughters of several of them expressed a wish for the picture of their handsome young member. Nick had not offered to paint it himself, and the studio was taken for granted rather than much looked into by the ladies in Calcutta Gardens. Too express a disposition to regard whims of this sort as a pure extravagance was known by them to be open to correction ; for they were not oblivious that Mr. Carteret had humors which weighed against them, in the shape of convenient cheques nestling between the inside pages of legible letters of advice. Mr. Carteret was Nick's providence, as Nick was looked to, in a general way, to be that of his mother and sisters, especially since it had become so plain that Percy, who was ungracefully selfish, would operate, mainly with a "six-bore," quite out of that sphere. It was not for studios, certainly, that Mr. Carteret sent cheques ; but they were an expression of general

confidence in Nick, and a little expansion was natural to a young man enjoying such a luxury as that. It was sufficiently felt, in Calcutta Gardens, that Nick could be looked to not to betray such a confidence ; for Mr. Carteret's behavior could have no name at all unless one were prepared to call it encouraging. He had never promised anything, but he was one of the delightful persons with whom the redemption precedes or dispenses with the vow. He had been an early and lifelong friend of the late right honorable gentleman, a political follower, a devoted admirer, a stanch supporter in difficult hours. He had never married, espousing nothing more reproductive than Sir Nicholas's views (he used to write letters to the Times in favor of them), and had, so far as was known, neither chick nor child ; nothing but an amiable little family of eccentricities, the flower of which was his odd taste for living in a small, steep, clean, country town, all green gardens and red walls, with a girdle of hedgerows, clustering about an immense brown old abbey. When Lady Agnes's imagination rested upon the future of her second son, she liked to remember that Mr. Carteret had nothing to "keep up : " the inference seemed so direct that he would keep up Nick.

The most important event in the life of this young man had been incomparably his victory, under his father's eyes, more than two years before, in the sharp contest for Crockhurst—a

victory which his consecrated name, his extreme youth, his ardor in the fray, the general personal sympathy of the party and the attention excited by the fresh cleverness of his speeches, tinted with young idealism and yet sticking sufficiently to the question (the burning question, it has since burned out), had rendered almost brilliant. There had been leaders in the newspapers about it, half in compliment to her husband, who was known to be failing so prematurely (he was almost as young to die, and to die famous — Lady Agnes regarded it as famous — as his son had been to stand), which the boy's mother religiously preserved, cut out and tied together with a ribbon, in the innermost drawer of a favorite cabinet. But it had been a barren, or almost a barren triumph, for in the order of importance in Nick's history another incident had run it, as the phrase is, very close: nothing less than the quick dissolution of the Parliament in which he was so manifestly destined to give symptoms of a future. He had not recovered his seat at the general election, for the second contest was even sharper than the first, and the Tories had put forward a loud, vulgar, rattling, almost bullying man. It was to a certain extent a comfort that poor Sir Nicholas, who had been witness of the bright hour, passed away before the darkness. He died, with all his hopes on his second son's head, unconscious of near disaster, handing on the torch and the tradition, after

a long, supreme interview with Nick, at which Lady Agnes had not been present, but which she knew to have been a sort of paternal dedication, a solemn communication of ideas on the highest national questions (she had reason to believe he had touched on those of external as well as of domestic and of colonial policy), leaving on the boy's nature and manner from that moment the most unmistakable traces. If his tendency to reverie increased, it was because he had so much to think over in what his pale father had said to him in the hushed, dim chamber, laying upon him the great mission of carrying out the unachieved and reviving a silent voice. It was work cut out for a lifetime, and that "coördinating power in relation to detail," which was one of the great characteristics of Sir Nicholas's high distinction (the most analytic of the weekly papers was always talking about it), had enabled him to rescue the prospect from any shade of vagueness or of ambiguity.

Five years before Nick Dormer went up to be questioned by the electors of Crockhurst, Peter Sherringham appeared before a board of examiners who let him off much less easily, though there were also some flattering prejudices in his favor; such influences being a part of the copious, light, unembarrassing baggage with which each of the young men began life. Peter passed, however, passed high, and had his reward in prompt assignment to small subordinate diplomatic duties in Germany. Since then he had had his profes-

sional adventures, which need not arrest us, inasmuch as they had all paled in the light of his appointment, nearly three years previous to the moment of our making his acquaintance, to a secretaryship of embassy in Paris. He had done well and had gone fast, and for the present he was willing enough to rest. It pleased him better to remain in Paris as a subordinate than to go to Honduras as a principal, and Nick Dormer had not put a false colour on the matter in speaking of his stall at the Théâtre Français as a sedative to his ambition. Nick's inferiority in age to his cousin sat on him more lightly than when they had been in their teens ; and indeed no one can very well be much older than a young man who has figured for a year, however imperceptibly, in the House of Commons. Separation and diversity had made them strange enough to each other to give a taste to what they shared ; they were friends without being particular friends ; that further degree could always hang before them as a suitable but not oppressive contingency, and they were both conscious that it was in their interest to keep certain differences to "chaff" each other about—so possible was it that they might have quarreled if they had only agreed. Peter, as being wide-minded, was a little irritated to find his cousin always so intensely British, while Nick Dormer made him the object of the same compassionate criticism, recognized that he had a rare knack with foreign tongues,

but reflected, and even with extravagance declared, that it was a pity to have gone so far from home only to remain so homely. Moreover, Nick had his ideas about the diplomatic mind ; it was the moral type of which, on the whole, he thought least favorably. Dry, narrow, barren, poor, he pronounced it in familiar conversation with the clever secretary ; wanting in imagination, in generosity, in the finest perceptions and the highest courage. This served as well as anything else to keep the peace between them ; it was a necessity of their friendly intercourse that they should scuffle a little, and it scarcely mattered what they scuffled about. Nick Dormer's express enjoyment of Paris, the shop-windows on the quays, the old books on the parapet, the gayety of the river, the grandeur of the Louvre, all the amusing tints and tones, struck his companion as a sign of insularity ; the appreciation of such things having become with Sherringham an unconscious habit, a contented assimilation. If poor Nick, for the hour, was demonstrative and lyrical, it was because he had no other way of sounding the note of farewell to the independent life of which the term seemed now definitely in sight ; the sense pressed upon him that these were the last moments of his freedom. He would waste time till half past seven, because half past seven meant dinner, and dinner meant his mother, solemnly attended by the strenuous shade of his father and reinforced by Julia.

VI.

WHEN Nick arrived with the three members of his family, Peter Sherringham was seated in the restaurant at which the tryst had been taken at a small but immaculate table ; but Mrs. Dallow was not yet on the scene, and they had time for a sociable settlement — time to take their places and unfold their napkins, crunch their rolls, breathe the savory air and watch the door, before the usual raising of heads and suspension of forks, the sort of stir that accompanied most of this lady's movements, announced her entrance. The *dame de comptoir* ducked and re-ducked, the people looked round, Peter and Nick got up, there was a shuffling of chairs and Julia was there. Peter had related how he had stopped at her hotel to bring her with him and had found her, according to her custom, by no means ready ; on which, fearing that his guests would come first to the rendezvous and find no proper welcome, he had come off without her, leaving her to follow. He had not brought a friend, as he intended, having divined that Julia would prefer a pure family party, if she wanted to talk about her candidate. Now she stood there, looking down at the table and her expectant kinsfolk, drawing off her

gloves, letting her brother draw off her jacket, lifting her hands for some rearrangement of her bonnet. She looked at Nick last, smiling, but only for a moment. She said to Peter, "Are we going to dine here? Oh dear, why did n't you have a private room?"

Nick had not seen her at all for several weeks, and had seen her but little for a year, but her off-hand, cursory manner had not altered in the interval. She spoke remarkably fast, as if speech were not in itself a pleasure — to have it over as soon as possible; and her *brusquerie* was of the kind that friendly critics account for by pleading shyness. Shyness had never appeared to him an ultimate quality or a real explanation of anything; it only explained an effect by another effect, giving a bad fault another name. What he suspected in Julia was that her mind was less graceful than her person; an ugly, a really damnatory idea, which as yet he had only half accepted. It was a case in which she was entitled to the benefit of every doubt and ought not to be judged without a complete trial. Dormer, meanwhile, was afraid of the trial (this was partly why, of late, he had been to see her so little), because he was afraid of the sentence, afraid of anything happening which should lessen the pleasure it was actually in the power of her beauty to give. There were people who thought her rude, and he hated rude women. If he should fasten on that view, or rather if that view should fasten on him,

what could still please and what he admired in her would lose too much of its sweetness. If it be thought odd that he had not yet been able to read the character of a woman he had known since childhood, the answer is that that character had grown faster than Nick Dormer's observation. The growth was constant, whereas the observation was but occasional, though it had begun early. If he had attempted to phrase the matter to himself, as he probably had not, he might have said that the effect she produced upon him was too much a compulsion; not the coercion of design, of importunity, nor the vulgar pressure of family expectation, a suspected desire that he should like her enough to marry her, but something that was a mixture of diverse things, of the sense that she was imperious and generous—but probably more the former than the latter—and of a certain prevision of doom, the influence of the idea that he should come to it, that he was predestined.

This had made him shrink from knowing the worst about her; the desire, not to get used to it in time, but what was more characteristic of him, to interpose a temporary illusion. Illusions and realities and hopes and fears, however, fell into confusion whenever he met her after a separation. The separation, so far as seeing her alone or as continuous talk was concerned, had now been tolerably long; had lasted really ever since his failure to regain his seat. An impression had come

to him that she judged that failure rather harshly, had thought he ought to have done better. This was a part of her imperious strain, and a part to which it was not easy to accommodate one's self on a present basis. If he were to marry her he should come to an understanding with her: he should give her his own measure as well as take hers. But the understanding, in the actual case, might suggest too much that he *was* to marry her. You could quarrel with your wife, because there were compensations—for her; but you might not be prepared to offer these compensations as prepayment for the luxury of quarreling.

It was not that such a luxury would not be considerable, Nick Dormer thought, as Julia Dallow's fine head poised itself before him again; a high spirit was a better thing than a poor one to be mismated with, any day in the year. She had much the same coloring as her brother, but as nothing else in her face was the same, the resemblance was not striking. Her hair was of so dark a brown that it was commonly regarded as black, and so abundant that a plain arrangement was required to keep it in discreet relation to the rest of her person. Her eyes were of a gray tint that was sometimes pronounced too light; and they were not sunken in her face, but placed well on the surface. Her nose was perfect, but her mouth was too small; and Nick Dormer, and doubtless other persons as well, had sometimes wondered how, with such a mouth, her face could

have expressed decision. Her figure helped it, for she looked tall (being extremely slender), though she was not; and her head took turns and positions which, though they were a matter of but half an inch out of the common, this way or that, somehow contributed to the air of resolution and temper. If it had not been for her extreme delicacy of line and surface, she might have been called bold; but as it was she looked refined and quiet — refined by tradition, and quiet for a purpose. And altogether she was beautiful, with the pure style of her capable head, her hair like darkness, her eyes like early twilight, her mouth like a rare pink flower.

Peter said that he had not taken a private room because he knew Biddy's tastes; she liked to see the world (she had told him so), the curious people, the coming and going of Paris. "Oh, anything for Biddy!" Julia replied, smiling at the girl and taking her place. Lady Agnes and her elder daughter exchanged one of their looks, and Nick exclaimed jocosely that he didn't see why the whole party should be sacrificed to a presumptuous child. The presumptuous child blushing protested she had never expressed any such wish to Peter, upon which Nick, with broader humor, revealed that Peter had served them so out of stinginess: he had pitchforked them together in the public room because he would n't go to the expense of a *cabinet*. He had brought no guest, no foreigner of distinction nor

diplomatic swell, to honor them, and now they would see what a paltry dinner he would give them. Peter stabbed him indignantly with a long roll, and Lady Agnes, who seemed to be waiting for some manifestation on Mrs. Dallow's part which did n't come, concluded, with a certain coldness, that they quite sufficed to themselves for privacy as well as for society. Nick called attention to this fine phrase of his mother's, said it was awfully neat, while Grace and Biddy looked harmoniously at Julia's clothes. Nick felt nervous, and joked a good deal to carry it off — a levity that did n't prevent Julia's saying to him, after a moment, "You might have come to see me to-day, you know. Did n't you get my message from Peter?"

"Scold him, Julia — scold him well. I begged him to go," said Lady Agnes; and to this Grace added her voice with an "Oh, Julia, do give it to him!" These words, however, had not the effect they suggested, for Mrs. Dallow only murmured, with an ejaculation, in her quick, curt way, that that would be making far too much of him. It was one of the things in her which Nick Dormer mentally pronounced ungraceful, that a perversity of pride or shyness always made her disappoint you a little, if she saw you expected a thing. She was certain to snub effusiveness. This vice, however, was the last thing of which Lady Agnes would have consented to being accused; and Nick, while he replied to Julia that

he was certain he should n't have found her, was not unable to perceive the operation, on his mother, of that shade of manner. "He ought to have gone; he owed you that," she went on; "but it's very true he would have had the same luck as we. I went with the girls directly after luncheon. I suppose you got our card."

"He might have come after I came in," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear Julia, I'm going to see you to-night. I've been waiting for that," Nick rejoined.

"Of course *we* had no idea when you would come in," said Lady Agnes.

"I'm so sorry. You must come to-morrow. I hate calls at night," Julia remarked.

"Well, then, will you roam with me? Will you wander through Paris on my arm?" Nick asked, smiling. "Will you take a drive with me?"

"Oh, that would be perfection!" cried Grace.

"I thought we were all going somewhere — to the Hippodrome, Peter," said Biddy.

"Oh, not all; just you and me!" laughed Peter.

"I am going home to my bed. I've earned my rest," Lady Agnes sighed.

"Can't Peter take *us*?" asked Grace. "Nick can take you home, mamma, if Julia won't receive him, and I can look perfectly after Peter and Biddy."

"Take them to something amusing; please

take them," Mrs. Dallow said to her brother. Her voice was kind, but had the expectation of assent in it, and Nick observed both the indulgence and the pressure. "You're tired, poor dear," she continued to Lady Agnes. "Fancy your being dragged about so! What did you come over for?"

"My mother came because I brought her," Nick said. "It's I who have dragged her about. I brought her for a little change. I thought it would do her good. I wanted to see the Salon."

"It is n't a bad time. I have a carriage, and you must use it; you must use nothing else. It shall take you everywhere. I will drive you about to-morrow." Julia dropped these words in the same perfunctory casual way as any others; but Nick had already noted, and he noted now afresh, with pleasure, that her abruptness was perfectly capable of conveying a benevolence. It was quite sufficiently manifest to him that for the rest of the time she might be near his mother she would do her numberless good turns. She would give things to the girls—he had a private adumbration of that; expensive Parisian, perhaps not perfectly useful things.

Lady Agnes was a woman who measured reciprocities and distances; but she was both too subtle and too just not to recognize the smallest manifestation that might count, either technically or essentially, as a service. "Dear Julia!" she

exclaimed, responsively ; and her tone made this brevity of acknowledgment sufficient. What Julia had said was all she wanted. "It's so interesting about Harsh," she added. "We're immensely excited."

"Yes, Nick looks it. *Merci, pas de vin.* It's just the thing for you, you know."

"To be sure he knows it. He's immensely grateful. It's really very kind of you."

"You do me a very great honor, Julia," said Nick.

"Don't be tiresome !" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow.

"We'll talk about it later. Of course there are lots of points," Nick pursued. "At present let us be purely convivial. Somehow Harsh is such a false note here. *A tout á l'heure !*"

"My dear fellow, you've caught exactly the tone of Mr. Gabriel Nash," Peter Sherringham observed.

"Who is Mr. Gabriel Nash ?" Mrs. Dallow asked.

"Nick, *is* he a gentleman ? Biddy says so," Grace Dormer interposed before this inquiry was answered.

"It is to be supposed that any one Nick brings to lunch with us" — Lady Agnes murmured.

"Ah, Grace, with your tremendous standard !" her brother said ; while Peter Sherringham replied to Julia that Mr. Nash was Nick's new Mentor or oracle ; whom, moreover, she should see, if she would come and have tea with him.

"I have n't the least desire to see him," Julia declared, "any more than I have to talk about Harsh and bore poor Peter."

"Oh, certainly, dear, you would bore me," said Sherringham.

"One thing at a time, then. Let us by all means be convivial. Only you must show me how," Mrs. Dallow went on to Nick. "What does he mean, cousin Agnes? Does he want us to drain the wine-cup, to flash with repartee?"

"You'll do very well," said Nick. "You are charming, this evening."

"Do go to Peter's, Julia, if you want something exciting. You'll see a marvelous girl," Biddy broke in, with her smile on Peter.

"Marvelous for what?"

"For thinking she can act, when she can't," said the roguish Biddy.

"Dear me, what people you all know! I hate Peter's theatrical people."

"And are n't you going home, Julia?" Lady Agnes inquired.

"Home to the hotel?"

"Dear, no, to Harsh, to see about everything."

"I'm in the midst of telegrams. I don't know yet."

"I suppose there's no doubt they'll have him," Lady Agnes decided to pursue.

"Who will have whom?"

"Why, the local people and the party; those

who invite a gentleman to stand. I'm speaking of my son."

"They'll have the person I want them to have, I dare say. There are so many people in it, in one way or another, it's dreadful. I like the way you sit there," Mrs. Dallow added to Nick Dormer.

"So do I," he smiled back at her; and he thought she *was* charming now, because she was gay and easy and willing really, though she might plead incompetence, to understand how jocose a dinner in a pothouse in a foreign town might be. She was in good-humor, or she was going to be, and not grand, nor stiff, nor indifferent, nor haughty, nor any of the things that people who disliked her usually found her and sometimes even a little made him believe her. The spirit of mirth, in some cold natures, manifests itself not altogether happily; their effort of recreation resembles too much the bath of the hippopotamus; but when Mrs. Dallow put her elbows on the table, one felt she could be trusted to get them safely off again.

For a family in mourning the dinner was lively; the more so that before it was half over Julia had arranged that her brother, eschewing the inferior spectacle, should take the girls to the Théâtre Français. It was her idea, and Nick had a chance to observe how an idea was apt to be not successfully controverted when it was Julia's. Even the programme appeared to have been pre-

arranged to suit it, just the thing for the cheek of the young person — “*Il ne Faut Jurer de Rien*” and “*Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*.” Peter was all willingness, but it was Julia who settled it, even to sending for the newspaper (her brother, by a rare accident, was unconscious of the evening’s bill), and to reassuring Bid- dy, who was happy but anxious, on the article of their not getting places, their being too late. Peter could always get places : a word from him, and the best box was at his disposal. She made him write the word on a card and saw that a messenger was dispatched with it to the Rue de Richelieu ; and all this was done without loudness or insistence, parenthetically and authoritatively. The box was bespoken ; the carriage, as soon as they had had their coffee, was found to be there ; Peter drove off in it with the girls, with the understanding that he was to send it back ; Nick sat waiting for it, over the finished repast, with the two ladies, and then his mother was relegated to it and conveyed to her apartments ; and all the while it was Julia who governed the succession of events. “Do be nice to her,” Lady Agnes murmured to him, as he placed her in the vehicle at the door of the restaurant ; and he guessed that it gave her a comfort to have left him sitting there with Mrs. Dallow.

Nick had every disposition to be nice to her ; if things went as she liked them, it was an acknowledgment of a certain force that was in

her — the force of assuming that they would. Julia had her differences — some of them were much for the better ; and when she was in a mood like this evening's, liberally dominant, he was ready to encourage her assumptions. While they waited for the return of the carriage, which had rolled away with his mother, she sat opposite to him, with her elbows on the table, playing first with one and then with another of the objects that encumbered it ; after five minutes of which she exclaimed, " Oh, I say, we 'll go ! " and got up abruptly, asking for her jacket. He said something about the carriage having had orders to come back for them, and she replied, " Well, it can go away again ! " She added, " I don't want a carriage ; I want to walk ; " and in a moment she was out of the place, with the people at the tables turning round again and the *caissière* swaying in her high seat. On the pavement of the boulevard she looked up and down : there were people at little tables, at the door ; there were people all over the broad expanse of the asphalt ; there was a profusion of light and a pervasion of sound ; and everywhere, though the establishment at which they had been dining was not in the thick of the fray, the tokens of a great traffic of pleasure, that night aspect of Paris which represents it as a huge market for sensations. Beyond the Boulevard des Capucines it flared through the warm evening like a vast bazaar ; and opposite the Café Durand the Madeleine rose theatri-

cal, a high, clever *décor*, before the footlights of the Rue Royale. "Where shall we go, what shall we do?" Mrs. Dallow asked, looking at her companion and somewhat to his surprise, as he had supposed that she only wanted to go home.

"Anywhere you like. It's so warm we might drive, instead of going indoors. We might go to the Bois. That would be agreeable."

"Yes, but it would n't be walking. However, that does n't matter. It's mild enough for anything — for sitting out, like all these people. And I've never walked in Paris at night: it would amuse me."

Nick hesitated. "So it might, but it is n't particularly recommended to ladies."

"I don't care, if it happens to suit me."

"Very well, then, we'll walk to the Bastille, if you like."

Julia hesitated, on her side, still looking round her.

"It's too far; I'm tired; we'll sit here." And she dropped beside an empty table, on the "terrace" of M. Durand. "This will do; it's amusing enough, and we can look at the Madeleine; that's respectable. If we must have something, we'll have a *madère*; is that respectable? Not particularly? So much the better. What are those people having? *Bocks*? Could n't we have *böcks*? Are they very low? Then I shall have one. I've been so wonderfully good — I've been staying at Versailles: *je me dois bien cela*."

She insisted, but pronounced the thin liquid in the tall glass very disgusting when it was brought. Nick was amazed, reflecting that it was not for such a discussion as this that his mother had left him with such complacency ; and indeed he too had, as she would have had, his share of perplexity, observing that nearly half an hour passed without his cousin's saying anything about Harsh.

Mrs. Dallow leaned back against the lighted glass of the *café*, comfortable and beguiled, watching the passers, the opposite shops, the movement of the square in front of them. She talked about London, about the news written to her in her absence, about Cannes and the people she had seen there, about her poor sister-in-law and her numerous progeny, and two or three droll things that had happened at Versailles. She discoursed considerably about herself, mentioning certain things she meant to do on her return to town, her plans for the rest of the season. Her carriage came and stood there, and Nick asked if he should send it away ; to which she said, " No, let it stand a bit." She let it stand a long time, and then she told him to dismiss it : they would walk home. She took his arm and they went along the boulevard, on the right hand side, to the Rue de la Paix, saying little to each other during the transit ; and then they passed into the hotel and up to her rooms. All she had said on the way was that she was very tired of Paris.

There was a shaded lamp in her *salon*, but the windows were open, and the light of the street, with its undisturbing murmur, as if everything ran on india-rubber, came up through the interstices of the balcony and made a vague glow and a flitting of shadows on the ceiling. Her maid appeared, busying herself a moment; and when she had gone out Julia said suddenly to her companion, "Should you mind telling me what's the matter with you?"

"The matter with me?"

"Don't you want to stand?"

"I'll do anything to oblige you."

"Why should you oblige me?"

"Why, is n't that the way people treat you?" asked Nick.

"They treat me best when they are a little serious."

"My dear Julia, it seems to me I'm serious enough. Surely it is n't an occasion to be so very solemn, the idea of going down into a stodgy little country town and talking a lot of rot."

"Why do you call it 'rot'?"

"Because I can think of no other name that, on the whole, describes it so well. You know the sort of thing. Come! you've listened to enough of it, first and last. One blushes for it when one sees it in print, in the local papers. The local papers — ah, the thought of them makes me want to stay in Paris."

"If you don't speak well it's your own fault;

you know how to, perfectly. And you usually do."

"I always do, and that's what I'm ashamed of. I speak beautifully. I've got the cursed humbugging trick of it. I can turn it on, a fine flood of it, at the shortest notice. The better it is the worse it is, the kind is so inferior. It has nothing to do with the truth or the search for it; nothing to do with intelligence, or candor, or honor. It's an appeal to everything that for one's self one despises," the young man went on — "to stupidity, to ignorance, to density, to the love of names and phrases, the love of hollow, idiotic words, of shutting the eyes tight and making a noise. Do men who respect each other or themselves talk to each other that way? They know they would deserve kicking! A man would blush to say to himself in the darkness of the night the things he stands up on a platform in the garish light of day to stuff into the ears of a multitude whose intelligence he pretends that he esteems." Nick Dormer stood at one of the windows, with his hands in his pockets. He had been looking out, but as his words followed each other faster he turned toward Mrs. Dallow, who had dropped upon a sofa, with her face to the window. She had given her jacket and gloves to her maid, but had kept on her bonnet; and she leaned forward a little as she sat, with her hands clasped together in her lap and her eyes upon her companion. The lamp, in a corner, was

so thickly veiled that the room was in tempered obscurity, lighted almost equally from the street, from the brilliant shop-fronts opposite. "Therefore, why be sapient and solemn about it, like an editorial in a newspaper?" Nick added, with a smile.

She continued to look at him for a moment after he had spoken; then she said: "If you don't want to stand, you have only to say so. You need n't give your reasons."

"It's too kind of you to let me off that! And then I'm a tremendous fellow for reasons; that's my strong point, don't you know? I've a lot more besides those I've mentioned, done up and ready for delivery. The odd thing is that they don't always govern my behavior. I rather think I do want to stand."

"Then what you said just now was a speech," Mrs. Dallow rejoined.

"A speech?"

"The 'rot,' the humbug of the hustings."

"No, those great truths remain, and a good many others. But an inner voice tells me I'm in for it. And it will be much more graceful to embrace this opportunity, accepting your coöperation, than to wait for some other and forfeit that advantage."

"I shall be very glad to help you, anywhere," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Thanks, awfully," murmured the young man, still standing there with his hands in his pockets.

"You would do it best in your own place, and I have no right to deny myself such a help."

Julia smiled at him for an instant. "I don't do it badly."

"Ah, you 're so political!"

"Of course I am; it's the only decent thing to be. But I can only help you if you'll help yourself. I can do a good deal, but I can't do everything. If you'll work, I'll work with you; but if you are going into it with your hands in your pockets, I'll have nothing to do with you." Nick instantly changed the position of these members and sank into a seat with his elbows on his knees. "You're very clever, but you must really take a little trouble. Things don't drop into people's mouths."

"I'll try — I'll try. I have a great incentive," Nick said.

"Of course you have."

"My mother, my poor mother." Mrs. Dallow made a slight exclamation, and he went on: "And of course, always, my father, dear man. My mother's even more political than you."

"I dare say she is, and quite right!" said Mrs. Dallow.

"And she can't tell me a bit more than you can what she thinks, what she believes, what she desires."

"Excuse me, I can tell you perfectly. There's one thing I always desire — to keep out a Tory."

"I see; that's a great philosophy."

"It will do very well. And I desire the good of the country. I'm not ashamed of that."

"And can you give me an idea of what it is — the good of the country?"

"I know perfectly what it is n't. It is n't what the Tories want to do."

"What do they want to do?"

"Oh, it would take me long to tell you. All sorts of trash."

"It would take you long, and it would take them longer! All they want to do is to prevent *us* from doing. On our side, we want to prevent them from preventing us. That's about as clearly as we all see it. So, on one side and the other, it's a beautiful, lucid, inspiring programme."

"I don't believe in you," Mrs. Dallow replied to this, leaning back on her sofa.

"I hope not, Julia, indeed!" He paused a moment, still with his face toward her and his elbows on his knees; then he pursued: "You are a very accomplished woman and a very zealous one; but you have n't an idea, you know — to call an idea. What you mainly want is to be at the head of a political salon; to start one, to keep it up, to make it a success."

"Much you know me!" Julia exclaimed; but he could see, through the dimness, that she had colored a little.

"You'll have it, in time, but I won't come to it," Nick went on.

"You can't come less than you do."

"When I say you'll have it, I mean you've already got it. That's why I don't come."

"I don't think you know what you mean," said Mrs. Dallow. "I have an idea that's as good as any of yours, any of those you have treated me to this evening, it seems to me — the simple idea that one ought to do something or other for one's country."

"‘Something or other’ certainly covers all the ground. There is one thing one can always do for one's country, which is not to be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

Nick Dormer hesitated a moment, laughing; then he said, "I'll tell you another time. It's very well to talk so glibly of standing," he added; "but it is n't absolutely foreign to the question that I have n't got the cash."

"What did you do before?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"The first time my father paid."

"And the other time?"

"Oh, Mr. Carteret."

"Your expenses won't be at all large; on the contrary," said Julia.

"They sha'n't be; I shall look out sharp for that. I shall have the great Hutchby."

"Of course; but, you know, I want you to do it well." She paused an instant, and then: "Of course you can send the bill to me."

"Thanks, awfully; you're tremendously kind. I should n't think of that." Nick Dormer got up

as he said these words, and walked to the window again, his companion's eyes resting upon him as he stood for a moment with his back to her. "I shall manage it somehow," he went on.

"Mr. Carteret will be delighted," said Julia.

"I dare say, but I hate taking people's money."

"That's nonsense, when it's for the country. Is n't it for *them*?"

"When they get it back!" Nick replied, turning round and looking for his hat. "It's startlingly late; you must be tired." Mrs. Dallow made no response to this, and he pursued his quest, successful only when he reached a duskier corner of the room, to which the hat had been relegated by his cousin's maid. "Mr. Carteret will expect so much, if he pays. And so would you."

"Yes, I'm bound to say I should!" And Mrs. Dallow emphasized this assertion by the way she rose erect. "If you're only going in to lose it, you had better stay out."

"How can I lose it, with you?" the young man asked, smiling. She uttered a word, impatiently but indistinguishably, and he continued: "And even if I do, it will have been immense fun."

"It *is* immense fun," said Julia. "But the best fun is to win. If you don't" —

"If I don't?" he repeated, as she hesitated.

"I'll never speak to you again."

"How much you expect, even when you don't pay!"

Mrs. Dallow's rejoinder was a justification of this remark, embodying as it did the fact that if they should receive on the morrow certain information on which she believed herself entitled to count, information tending to show that the Tories meant to fight the seat hard, not to lose it again, she should look to him to be in the field as early as herself. Sunday was a lost day; she should leave Paris on Monday.

"Oh, they'll fight it hard; they'll put up Kingsbury," said Nick, smoothing his hat. "They'll all come down—all that can get away. And Kingsbury has a very handsome wife."

"She is not so handsome as your cousin," Mrs. Dallow hazarded.

"Oh dear, no—a cousin sooner than a wife, any day!" Nick laughed as soon as he had said this, as if the speech had an awkward side; but the reparation perhaps scarcely mended it, the exaggerated mock-meekness with which he added: "I'll do any blessed thing you tell me."

"Come here to-morrow, then, as early as ten." She turned round, moving to the door with him; but before they reached it she demanded, abruptly: "Pray, is n't a gentleman to do anything, to be anything?"

"To be anything?"

"If he does n't aspire to serve the state."

"To make his political fortune, do you mean? Oh, bless me, yes, there are other things."

"What other things, that can compare with that?"

"Well, I, for instance, I 'm very fond of the arts."

"Of the arts?"

"Did you never hear of them? I 'm awfully fond of painting."

At this Mrs. Dallow stopped short, and her fine gray eyes had for a moment the air of being set further forward in her head. "Don't be odious! Good-night," she said, turning away and leaving him to go.

VII.

PETER SHERRINGHAM, the next day, reminded Nick that he had promised to be present with him at Madame Carré's interview with the ladies introduced to her by Gabriel Nash; and in the afternoon, in accordance with this arrangement, the two men took their way to the Rue de Constantinople. They found Mr. Nash and his friends in the small beflounced drawing-room of the old actress, who, as they learned, had sent in a request for ten minutes' grace, having been detained at a lesson — a rehearsal of a *comédie de salon*, to be given, for a charity, by a fine lady, at which she had consented to be present as an adviser. Mrs. Rooth sat on a black satin sofa, with her daughter beside her, and Gabriel Nash wandered about the room, looking at the votive offerings which converted the little paneled box, decorated in sallow white and gold, into a theatrical museum: the presents, the portraits, the wreaths, the diadems, the letters, framed and glazed, the trophies and tributes and relics collected by Madame Carré during half a century of renown. The profusion of this testimony was hardly more striking than the confession of something missed, something hushed, which seemed to rise from it

all and make it melancholy, like a reference to clappings which, in the nature of things, could now only be present as a silence : so that if the place was full of history, it was the form without the fact, or at the most a redundancy of the one to a pinch of the other — the history of a mask, of a squeak, a record of movements in the air.

Some of the objects exhibited by the distinguished artist, her early portraits, in lithograph or miniature, represented the costume and embodied the manner of a period so remote that Nick Dormer, as he glanced at them, felt a quickened curiosity to look at the woman who reconciled being alive to-day with having been alive so long ago. Peter Sherringham already knew how she managed this miracle, but every visit he paid to her added to his amused, charmed sense that it *was* a miracle, and his extraordinary old friend had seen things that he should never, never see. Those were just the things he wanted to see most, and her duration, her survival, cheated him agreeably and helped him a little to guess them. His appreciation of the actor's art was so systematic that it had an antiquarian side, and at the risk of representing him as attached to a futility it must be said that he had as yet hardly known a keener regret for anything than for the loss of that antecedent world, and in particular for his having come too late for the great *comédienne*, the light of the French stage in the early years of the century, of whose example and instruction

Madame Carré had had the inestimable benefit. She had often described to him her rare predecessor, straight from whose hands she had received her most celebrated parts, and of whom her own manner was often a religious imitation ; but her descriptions troubled him more than they consoled, only confirming his theory, to which so much of his observation had already ministered, that the actor's art, in general, is going down and down, descending a slope with abysses of vulgarity at its foot, after having reached its perfection, more than fifty years ago, in the talent of the lady in question. He would have liked to dwell for an hour beneath the meridian.

Gabriel Nash introduced the new-comers to his companions ; but the younger of the two ladies gave no sign of lending herself to this transaction. The girl was very white ; she huddled there, silent and rigid, frightened to death, staring, expressionless. If Bridget Dormer had seen her at this moment she might have felt avenged for the discomfiture she had suffered the day before, at the Salon, under the challenging eyes of Maud Vavasour. It was plain at the present hour, that Miss Vavasour would have run away had she not felt that the persons present would prevent her escape. Her aspect made Nick Dormer feel as if the little temple of art in which they were collected had been the waiting-room of a dentist. Sherringham had seen a great many nervous girls trembling before the same

ordeal, and he liked to be kind to them, to say things that would help them to do themselves justice. The probability, in a given case, was almost overwhelmingly in favor of their having any other talent one could think of in a higher degree than the dramatic; but he could rarely forbear to interpose, even as against his conscience, to keep the occasion from being too cruel. There were occasions indeed that could scarcely be too cruel to punish properly certain examples of presumptuous ineptitude. He remembered what Mr. Nash had said about this blighted maiden, and perceived that though she might be inept she was now anything but presumptuous. Gabriel fell to talking with Nick Dormer, and Peter addressed himself to Mrs. Rooth. There was no use as yet in saying anything to the girl; she was too scared even to hear. Mrs. Rooth, with her shawl fluttering about her, nestled against her daughter, putting out her hand to take one of Miriam's, soothingly. She had pretty, silly, near-sighted eyes, a long, thin nose and an upper lip which projected over the under as an ornamental cornice rests on its support. "So much depends — really everything!" she said in answer to some sociable observation of Sherringham's. "It's either this," and she rolled her eyes expressively about the room, "or it's — I don't know what!"

"Perhaps we're too many," Peter hazarded, to her daughter. "But really, you'll find, after you

fairly begin, that you 'll do better with four or five."

Before she answered she turned her head and lifted her fine eyes. The next instant he saw they were full of tears. The word she spoke, however, though uttered in a deep, serious tone, had not the note of sensibility: "Oh, I don't care for *you*!" He laughed, at this, declared it was very well said, and that if she could give Madame Carré such a specimen as that —! The actress came in before he had finished his phrase, and he observed the way the girl slowly got up to meet her, hanging her head a little and looking at her from under her brows. There was no sentiment in her face — only a kind of vacancy of terror which had not even the merit of being fine of its kind, for it seemed stupid and superstitious. Yet the head was good, he perceived at the same moment; it was strong and salient and made to tell at a distance. Madame Carré scarcely noticed her at first, greeting her only in her order, with the others, and pointing to seats, composing the circle with smiles and gestures, as if they were all before the prompter's box. The old actress presented herself to a casual glance as a red-faced woman in a wig, with beady eyes, a hooked nose and pretty hands; but Nick Dormer, who had a perception of physiognomy, speedily observed that these free characteristics included a great deal of delicate detail — an eyebrow, a nostril, a flitting of expressions, as if a multitude of little facial

wires were pulled from within. This accomplished artist had in particular a mouth which was visibly a rare instrument, a pair of lips whose curves and fine corners spoke of a lifetime of "points" unerringly made and verses exquisitely spoken, helping to explain the purity of the sound that issued from them. Her whole countenance had the look of long service — of a thing infinitely worn and used, drawn and stretched to excess, with its elasticity overdone and its springs relaxed, yet religiously preserved and kept in repair, like an old valuable time-piece, which might have quivered and rumbled, but could be trusted to strike the hour. At the first words she spoke Gabriel Nash exclaimed, endearingly, "Ah, la voix de Célimène!" Célimène, who wore a big red flower on the summit of her dense wig, had a very grand air, a toss of the head and sundry little majesties of manner; in addition to which she was strange, almost grotesque, and to some people would have been even terrifying, capable of reappearing, with her hard eyes, as a queer vision in the darkness. She excused herself for having made the company wait, and mouthed and mimicked in the drollest way, with intonations as fine as a flute, the performance and the pretensions of the *belles dames* to whom she had just been endeavoring to communicate a few of the rudiments. "Mais celles-là, c'est une plaisanterie," she went on, to Mrs. Rooth; "whereas you and your daughter, *chère madame* — I am sure that you are quite another matter."

The girl had got rid of her tears, and was gazing at her, and Mrs. Rooth leaned forward and said insinuatingly : " She knows four languages."

Madame Carré gave one of her histrionic stares, throwing back her head. " That's three too many. The thing is to do something with one of them."

" We're very much in earnest," continued Mrs. Rooth, who spoke excellent French.

" I'm glad to hear it — *il n'y a que ça*. La tête est bien — the head is very good," she said, looking at the girl. " But let us see, my dear child, what you've got in it ! " The young lady was still powerless to speak ; she opened her lips, but nothing came. With the failure of this effort she turned her deep, sombre eyes upon the three men. "*Un beau regard* — it carries well," Madame Carré hinted. But even as she spoke Miss Rooth's fine gaze was suffused again, and the next moment she had begun to weep. Nick Dormer sprung up ; he felt embarrassed and intrusive — there was such an indelicacy in sitting there to watch a poor girl's struggle with timidity. There was a momentary confusion ; Mrs. Rooth's tears were seen also to flow ; Gabriel Nash began to laugh, addressing, however, at the same time, the friendliest, most familiar encouragement to his companions, and Peter Sherringham offered to retire with Nick on the spot, if their presence was oppressive to the young lady. But the agitation was over in a minute ; Madame Carré mo-

tioned Mrs. Rooth out of her seat and took her place beside the girl, and Gabriel Nash explained judiciously to the other men that she would be worse if they were to go away. Her mother begged them to remain, "so that there should be at least some English;" she spoke as if the old actress were an army of Frenchwomen. The girl was quickly better, and Madame Carré, on the sofa beside her, held her hand and emitted a perfect music of reassurance. "The nerves, the nerves—they are half of our trade. Have as many as you like, if you've got something else too. *Voyons*—do you know anything?"

"I know some pieces."

"Some pieces of the *répertoire*?"

Miriam Rooth stared as if she didn't understand. "I know some poetry."

"English, French, Italian, German," said her mother.

Madame Carré gave Mrs. Rooth a look which expressed irritation at the recurrence of this announcement. "Does she wish to act in all those tongues? The phrase-book is n't the comedy!"

"It is only to show you how she has been educated."

"Ah, *chère madame*, there is no education that matters! I mean save the right one. Your daughter must have a language, like me, like *ces messieurs*."

"You see if I can speak French," said the girl,

smiling dimly at her hostess. She appeared now almost to have collected herself.

"You speak it in perfection."

"And English just as well," said Miss Rooth.

"You ought n't to be an actress; you ought to be a governess."

"Oh, don't tell us that: it's to escape from that!" pleaded Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm very sure your daughter will escape from that," Peter Sherringham was moved to remark.

"Oh, if *you* could help her!" the lady exclaimed, pathetically.

"She has certainly all the qualities that strike the eye," said Peter.

"You are *most* kind, sir!" Mrs. Rooth declared, elegantly draping herself.

"She knows Célimène; I have heard her do Célimène," Gabriel Nash said to Madame Carré.

"And she knows Juliet, and Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra," added Mrs. Rooth.

"*Voyons*, my dear child, do you wish to work for the French stage or for the English?" the old actress demanded.

"Ours would have sore need of you, Miss Rooth," Sherringham gallantly interposed.

"Could you speak to any one in London — could you introduce her?" her mother eagerly asked.

"Dear madam, I must hear her first, and hear what Madame Carré says."

"She has a voice of rare beauty, and I understand voices," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Ah, then, if she has intelligence, she has every gift."

"She has a most poetic mind," the old lady went on.

"I should like to paint her portrait; she's made for that," Nick Dormer ventured to observe to Mrs. Rooth; partly because he was struck with the girl's capacity as a model, partly to mitigate the crudity of inexpressive spectatorship.

"So all the artists say. I have had three or four heads of her, if you would like to see them: she has been done in several styles. If you were to do her I am sure it would make her celebrated."

"And me too," said Nick, laughing.

"It would indeed, a member of Parliament!" Nash declared.

"Ah, I have the honour — ?" murmured Mrs. Rooth, looking gratified and mystified.

Nick explained that she had no honour at all, and meanwhile Madame Carré had been questioning the girl. "*Chère madame*, I can do nothing with your daughter; she knows too much!" she broke out. "It's a pity, because I like to catch them wild."

"Oh, she's wild enough, if that's all! And that's the very point, the question of where to try," Mrs. Rooth went on. "Into what do I launch her — upon what dangerous, stormy sea? I've thought of it so anxiously."

"Try here — try the French public : they're so much the most serious," said Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, no, try the English : there's such a rare opening!" Sherringham exclaimed, in quick opposition.

"Ah, it is n't the public, dear gentlemen. It's the private side, the other people — it's the life — it's the moral atmosphere."

"Je ne connais qu'une scène — la nôtre," Madame Carré asserted. "I have been informed there is no other."

"And very correctly," said Gabriel Nash. "The theatre in our countries is puerile and barbarous."

"There is something to be done for it, and perhaps mademoiselle is the person to do it," Sherringham suggested, contentiously.

"Ah, but, *en attendant*, what can it do for her?" Madame Carré asked.

"Well, anything that I can help it to do," said Peter Sherringham, who was more and more struck with the girl's rich type. Miriam Rooth sat in silence, while this discussion went on, looking from one speaker to the other with a suspended, literal air.

"Ah, if your part is marked out, I congratulate you, mademoiselle!" said the old actress, underlining the words as she had often underlined such words on the stage. She smiled with large permissiveness on the young aspirant, who appeared not to understand her. Her tone pene-

trated, however, to certain depths in the mother's nature, adding another stir to agitated waters.

"I feel the responsibility of what she shall find in the life, the standards, of the theatre," Mrs. Rooth explained. "Where is the purest tone — where are the highest standards? that's what I ask," the good lady continued, with a persistent candor which elicited a peal of unceremonious but sociable laughter from Gabriel Nash.

"The purest tone — *qu'est-ce-que-c'est que ça?*" Madame Carré demanded, in the finest manner of modern comedy.

"We are very, *very* respectable," Mrs. Rooth went on, smiling and achieving lightness, too. "What I want to do is to place my daughter where the conduct — and the picture of conduct, in which she should take part — wouldn't be absolutely dreadful. Now, *chère madame*, how about all that; how about the conduct in the French theatre — the things she should see, the things she should hear?"

"I don't think I know what you are talking about. They are the things she may see and hear everywhere; only they are better done, they are better said. The only conduct that concerns an actress, it seems to me, is her own, and the only way for her to behave herself is not to be a stick. I know no other conduct."

"But there are characters, there are situations, which I don't think I should like to see *her* undertake."

"There are many, no doubt, which she would do well to leave alone!" laughed the French-woman.

"I should n't like to see her represent a very bad woman — a *really* bad one," Mrs. Rooth serenely pursued.

"Ah, in England, then, and in your theatre, every one is good? Your plays must be even more ingenious than I supposed!"

"We have n't any plays," said Gabriel Nash.

"People will write them for Miss Rooth — it will be a new era," Peter Sherringham rejoined, with wanton, or at any rate combative optimism.

"Will *you*, sir — will you do something? A sketch of some truly noble female type?" the old lady asked, engagingly.

"Oh, I know what you do with our pieces — to show your superior virtue!" Madame Carré broke in, before he had time to reply that he wrote nothing but diplomatic memoranda. "Bad women? Je n'ai joué que ça, madame. 'Really' bad? I tried to make them real!"

"I can say 'L'Aventurière,'" Miriam interrupted, in a cold voice which seemed to hint at a want of participation in the maternal solitudes.

"Confer on us the pleasure of hearing you, then. Madame Carré will give you the *réplique*," said Peter Sherringham.

"Certainly, my child; I can say it without the book," Madame Carré responded. "Put yourself there — move that chair a little away." She

patted her young visitor, encouraging her to rise, settling with her the scene they should take, while the three men sprang up to arrange a place for the performance. Miriam left her seat and looked vaguely round her ; then, having taken off her hat and given it to her mother, she stood on the designated spot with her eyes on the ground. Abruptly, however, instead of beginning the scene, Madame Carré turned to the elder lady with an air which showed that a rejoinder to this visitor's remarks of a moment before had been gathering force in her breast.

"You mix things up, *chère madame*, and I have it on my heart to tell you so. I believe it's rather the case with you other English, and I have never been able to learn that either your morality or your talent is the gainer by it. To be too respectable to go where things are done best is, in my opinion, to be very vicious indeed ; and to do them badly in order to preserve your virtue is to fall into a grossness more shocking than any other. To do them well is virtue enough, and not to make a mess of it the only respectability. That's hard enough to merit Paradise. Everything else is base humbug! *Voilà chère madame*, the answer I have for your scruples !"

"It's admirable — admirable ; and I am glad my friend Dormer here has had the great advantage of hearing you utter it !" Gabriel Nash exclaimed, looking at Nick.

Nick thought it, in effect, a speech denoting an intelligence of the question, but he rather resented the idea that Nash should assume that it would strike him as a revelation ; and to show his familiarity with the line of thought it indicated, as well as to play his part appreciatively in the little circle, he observed to Mrs. Rooth, as if they might take many things for granted : "In other words, your daughter must find her safeguard in the artistic conscience." But he had no sooner spoken than he was struck with the oddity of their discussing so publicly, and under the poor girl's nose, the conditions which Miss Rooth might find the best for the preservation of her personal integrity. However, the anomaly was light and unoppressive—the echoes of a public discussion of delicate questions seemed to linger so familiarly in the egotistical little room. Moreover the heroine of the occasion evidently was losing her embarrassment ; she was the priestess on the tripod, awaiting the afflatus and thinking only of that. Her bared head, of which she had changed the position, holding it erect, while her arms hung at her sides, was admirable ; and her eyes gazed straight out of the window, at the houses on the opposite side of the Rue de Constantinople.

Mrs. Rooth had listened to Madame Carré with startled, respectful attention, but Nick, considering her, was very sure that she had not understood her hostess's little lesson. Yet this did

not prevent her from exclaiming in answer to him : " Oh, a fine artistic life — what indeed is more beautiful ? "

Peter Sherringham had said nothing ; he was watching Miriam and her attitude. She wore a black dress, which fell in straight folds ; her face, under her mobile brows, was pale and regular, with a strange, strong, tragic beauty. " I don't know what's in her," he said to himself ; " nothing, it would seem, from her persistent vacancy. But such a face as that, such a head, is a fortune ! " Madame Carré made her commence, giving her the first line of the speech of Clorinde : " Vous ne me fuyez pas, mon enfant, aujourd'hui. " But still the girl hesitated, and for an instant she appeared to make a vain, convulsive effort. In this effort she frowned portentously ; her low forehead overhung her eyes ; the eyes themselves, in shadow, stared, splendid and cold, and her hands clinched themselves at her sides. She looked austere and terrible, and during this moment she was an incarnation the vividness of which drew from Sherringham a stifled cry. " Elle est bien belle — ah, ça ! " murmured the old actress ; and in the pause which still preceded the issue of sound from the girl's lips Peter turned to his kinsman, and said in a low tone :

" You must paint her just like that. "

" Like that ? "

" As the Tragic Muse. "

She began to speak ; a long, strong, colorless

voice came quavering from her young throat. She delivered the lines of Clorinde, in the fine interview with Célie, in the third act of the play, with a rude monotony, and then, gaining confidence, with an effort at modulation which was not altogether successful and which evidently she felt not to be so. Madame Carré sent back the ball without raising her hand, repeating the speeches of Célie, which her memory possessed from their having so often been addressed to her, and uttering the verses with soft, communicative art. So they went on through the scene, and when it was over it had not precisely been a triumph for Miriam Rooth. Sherringham forbore to look at Gabriel Nash, and Madame Carré said: "I think you have a voice, *ma fille*, somewhere or other. We must try and put our hand on it." Then she asked her what instruction she had had, and the girl, lifting her eyebrows, looked at her mother, while her mother prompted her.

"Mrs. Delamere, in London; she was once an ornament of the English stage. She gives lessons just to a very few; it's a great favour. Such a very nice person! But above all, Signor Ruggeri — I think he taught us most." Mrs. Rooth explained that this gentleman was an Italian tragedian, in Rome, who instructed Miriam in the proper manner of pronouncing his language, and also in the art of declaiming and gesticulating.

"Gesticulating, I'll warrant!" declared their hostess. "They mimic as if for the deaf, they emphasize as if for the blind. Mrs. Delamere is doubtless an epitome of all the virtues, but I never heard of her. You travel too much," Madame Carré went on; "that's very amusing, but the way to study is to stay at home, to shut yourself up and hammer at your scales." Mrs. Rooth complained that they had no home to stay at; in rejoinder to which the old actress exclaimed, "Oh, you English, you are *d'une légèreté à faire rougir*. If you have n't a home, you must make one. In our profession it's the first requisite."

"But where? That's what I ask!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"Why not here?" Sherringham inquired.

"Oh, here!" And the good lady shook her head, with a world of suggestions.

"Come and live in London, and then I shall be able to paint your daughter," Nick Dormer interposed.

"Is that all that it will take, my dear fellow?" asked Gabriel Nash.

"Ah, London is full of memories," Mrs. Rooth went on. "My father had a great house there—we always came up. But all that's over."

"Study here, and go to London to appear," said Peter Sherringham, feeling frivolous even as he spoke.

"To appear in French?"

"No, in the language of Shakespeare."

"But we can't study that here."

"M. Sherringham means that he will give you lessons," Madame Carré explained. "Let me not fail to say it—he's an excellent critic."

"How do you know that—you who are perfect?" asked Sherringham: an inquiry to which the answer was forestalled by the girl's rousing herself to make it public that she could recite the "Nights" of Alfred de Musset.

"Diable!" said the actress, "that's more than I can! But by all means give us a specimen."

The girl again placed herself in position and rolled out a fragment of one of the splendid conversations of Musset's poet with his muse—rolled it loudly and proudly, tossed it and tumbled it about the room. Madame Carré watched her at first, but after a few moments she shut her eyes, though the best part of the business was to look. Sherringham had supposed Miriam was abashed by the flatness of her first performance, but now he perceived that she could not have been conscious of this; she was rather exhilarated and emboldened. She made a muddle of the divine verses, which, in spite of certain sonorities and cadences, an evident effort to imitate a celebrated actress, a comrade of Madame Carré, whom she had heard declaim them, she produced as if she had but a dim idea of their meaning. When she had finished, Madame Carré passed no judgment; she only said: "Perhaps you had better say something English." She suggested some

little piece of verse — some fable, if there were fables in English. She appeared but scantily surprised to hear that there were not — it was a language of which one expected so little. Mrs. Rooth said, "She knows her Tennyson by heart. I think he's more profound than La Fontaine;" and after some deliberation and delay Miriam broke into "The Lotos-Eaters," from which she passed directly, almost breathlessly, to "Edward Gray." Sherringham had by this time heard her make four different attempts, and the only generalization which could be very present to him was that she uttered these dissimilar compositions in exactly the same tone — a solemn, droning, dragging measure, adopted with an intention of pathos, a crude idea of "style." It was funereal, and at the same time it was rough and childish. Sherringham thought her English performance less futile than her French, but he could see that Madame Carré listened to it with even less pleasure. In the way the girl wailed forth some of her Tennysonian lines he detected a possibility of a thrill. But the further she went, the more violently she acted on the nerves of Mr. Gabriel Nash: that also he could discover, from the way this gentleman ended by slipping discreetly to the window and leaning there, with his head out and his back to the exhibition. He had the art of mute expression; his attitude said, as clearly as possible, "No, no, you can't call me either ill-mannered or ill-natured. I'm the show-

man of the occasion, moreover, and I avert myself, leaving you to judge. If there's a thing in life I hate, it's this idiotic new fashion of the drawing-room recitation, and the insufferable creatures who practice it, who prevent conversation and whom, as they are beneath it, you can't punish by criticism. Therefore what I am is only too magnanimous — bringing these benighted women here, paying with my person, stifling my just repugnance."

At the same time that Sherringham pronounced privately that the manner in which Miss Rooth had acquitted herself offered no element of interest, he remained conscious that something surmounted and survived her failure, something that would perhaps be worth taking hold of. It was the element of outline and attitude, the way she stood, the way she turned her eyes, her head, and moved her limbs. These things held the attention; they had a natural felicity and, in spite of their suggesting too much the school-girl in the *tableau-vivant*, a sort of grandeur. Her face, moreover, grew as he watched it; something delicate dawned in it, a dim promise of variety and a touching plea for patience, as if it were conscious of being able to show in time more expressions than the simple and striking gloom which, as yet, had mainly graced it. In short, the plastic quality of her person was the only definite sign of a vocation. He almost hated to have to recognize this; he had seen that quality so often

when it meant nothing at all that he had come at last to regard it as almost a guarantee of incompetence. He knew Madame Carré valued it, by itself, so little that she counted it out in measuring an histrionic nature; when it was not accompanied with other properties which helped and completed it she was near considering it as a positive hindrance to success — success of the only kind that she esteemed. Far oftener than he, she had sat in judgment on young women for whom hair and eyebrows and a disposition for the statuesque would have worked the miracle of attenuating their stupidity if the miracle were workable. But that particular miracle never was. The qualities she deemed most interesting were not the gifts, but the conquests — the effects the actor had worked hard for, had wrested by unwearying study. Sherringham remembered to have had, in the early part of their acquaintance, a friendly dispute with her on this subject; he having been moved at that time to defend the cause of the gifts. She had gone so far as to say that a serious comedian ought to be ashamed of them — ashamed of resting his case on them; and when Sherringham had cited Mademoiselle Rachel as a great artist whose natural endowment was rich and who had owed her highest triumphs to it, she had declared that Rachel was the very instance that proved her point — a talent embodying one or two primary aids, a voice and an eye, but essentially formed by work,

unremitting and ferocious work. "I don't care a straw for your handsome girls," she said; "but bring me one who is ready to drudge the tenth part of the way Rachel drudged, and I'll forgive her her beauty. Of course, *notez bien*, Rachel was n't a *bête*: that's a gift, if you like!"

Mrs. Rooth, who was evidently very proud of the figure her daughter had made, appealed to Madame Carré, rashly and serenely, for a verdict; but fortunately this lady's voluble *bonne* came rattling in at the same moment with the tea-tray. The old actress busied herself in dispensing this refreshment, an hospitable attention to her English visitors, and under cover of the diversion thus obtained, while the others talked together, Sherringham said to his hostess: "Well, is there anything in her?"

"Nothing that I can see. She's loud and coarse."

"She's very much afraid; you must allow for that."

"Afraid of me, immensely, but not a bit afraid of her authors—nor of you!" added Madame Carré, smiling.

"Are n't you prejudiced by what Mr. Nash has told you?"

"Why prejudiced? He only told me she was very handsome."

"And don't you think she is?"

"Admirable. But I'm not a photographer nor a dressmaker. I can't do anything with that."

"The head is very noble," said Peter Sherringham. "And the voice, when she spoke English, had some sweet tones."

"Ah, your English — possibly! All I can say is that I listened to her conscientiously, and I did n't perceive in what she did a single *nuance*, a single inflection or intention. But not one, *mon cher*. I don't think she's intelligent."

"But don't they often seem stupid at first?"

"Say always!"

"Then don't some succeed — even when they are handsome?"

"When they are handsome they always succeed — in one way or another."

"You don't understand us English," said Peter Sherringham.

Madame Carré drank her tea; then she replied: "Marry her, my son, and give her diamonds. Make her an ambassadress; she will look very well."

"She interests you so little that you don't care to do anything for her?"

"To do anything?"

"To give her a few lessons."

The old actress looked at him a moment; after which, rising from her place near the table on which the tea had been served, she said to Miriam Rooth: "My dear child, I give my voice for the *scène anglaise*. You did the English things best."

"Did I do them well?" asked the girl.

"You have a great deal to learn; but you have

force. The principal things *sont encore à dégager*, but they will come. You must work."

"I think she has ideas," said Mrs. Rooth.

"She gets them from you," Madame Carré replied.

"I must say, if it's to be *our* theatre I'm relieved. I think it's safer," the good lady continued.

"Ours is dangerous, no doubt."

"You mean you are more severe," said the girl.

"Your mother is right," the actress smiled; "you have ideas."

"But what shall we do then — how shall we proceed?" Mrs. Rooth inquired.

She made this appeal, plaintively and vaguely, to the three gentlemen; but they had collected, a few steps off, and were talking together, so that it failed to reach them.

"Work — work — work!" exclaimed the actress.

"In English I can play Shakespeare. I want to play Shakespeare," Miriam remarked.

"That's fortunate, as, in English, you have n't any one else to play."

"But he's so great — and he's so pure!" said Mrs. Rooth.

"That also seems very fortunate for you," Madame Carré phrased.

"You think me actually pretty bad, don't you?" the girl demanded, with her serious face.

"Mon Dieu, que vous dirai-je? Of course you're rough; but so was I, at your age. And if you find your voice it may carry you far. Besides, what does it matter what I think? How can I judge for your English public?"

"How shall I find my voice?" asked Miriam Rooth.

"By trying. Il n'y a que ça. Work like a horse, night and day. Besides, M. Sherringham, as he says, will help you."

Sherringham, hearing his name, turned round, and the girl appealed to him. "Will you help me, really?"

"To find her voice," Madame Carré interposed.

"The voice, when it's worth anything, comes from the heart; so I suppose that's where to look for it," Gabriel Nash suggested.

"Much you know; you have n't got any!" Miriam retorted, with the first scintillation of gayety she had shown on this occasion.

"Any voice, my child?" Mr. Nash inquired.

"Any heart — or any manners!"

Peter Sherringham made the secret reflection that he liked her better when she was lugubrious; for the note of pertness was not totally absent from her mode of emitting these few words. He was irritated, moreover, for in the brief conference he had just had with the young lady's introducer he had had to face the necessity of saying something optimistic about her, which was not particularly easy. Mr. Nash had said with his

bland smile, "And what impression does my young friend make?" to which it appeared to Sherringham that an uncomfortable consistency compelled him to reply that there was evidently a good deal in her. He was far from being sure of that; at the same time, the young lady, both with the exaggerated "points" of her person and the poverty of her instinct of expression, constituted a kind of challenge — presented herself to him as a subject for inquiry, a problem, a piece of work, an explorable country. She was too bad to jump at, and yet she was too individual to overlook, especially when she rested her tragic eyes on him with the appeal of her deep "Really?" This appeal sounded as if it were in a certain way to his honour, giving him a chance to brave verisimilitude, to brave ridicule even, a little, in order to show, in a special case, what he had always maintained in general, that the direction of a young person's studies for the stage may be an interest of as high an order as any other artistic consideration.

"Mr. Nash has rendered us the great service of introducing us to Madame Carré, and I'm sure we're immensely indebted to him," Mrs. Rooth said to her daughter, with an air affectionately corrective.

"But what good does that do us?" the girl asked, smiling at the actress and gently laying her finger-tips upon her hand. "Madame Carré listens to me with adorable patience, and then

sends me about my business — in the prettiest way in the world.”

“Mademoiselle, you are not so rough; the tone of that is very *juste*. A la bonne heure; work — work!” the actress exclaimed. “There was an inflection there, or very nearly. Practice it till you’ve got it.”

“Come and practice it to me, if your mother will be so kind as to bring you,” said Peter Sherringham.

“Do you give lessons — do you understand?” Miriam asked.

“I’m an old play-goer, and I have an unbounded belief in my own judgment.”

“‘Old,’ sir, is too much to say,” Mrs. Rooth remonstrated. “My daughter knows your high position, but she is very direct. You will always find her so. Perhaps you’ll say there are less honourable faults. We’ll come to see you with pleasure. Oh, I’ve been at the Embassy, when I was her age. Therefore why should n’t she go to-day? That was in Lord Davenant’s time.”

“A few people are coming to tea with me to-morrow. Perhaps you’ll come then, at five o’clock.”

“It will remind me of the dear old times,” said Mrs. Rooth.

“Thank you; I’ll try and do better to-morrow,” Miriam remarked, very sweetly.

“You do better every minute!” Sherringham exclaimed, looking at Madame Carré in emphasis of this declaration.

"She is finding her voice," the actress cried.

"She is finding a friend!" Mrs. Rooth amended.

"And don't forget, when you come to London, my hope that you'll come and see *me*," Nick Dormer said to the girl. "To try and paint you — that would do me good!"

"She is finding even two," said Madame Carré.

"It's to make up for one I've lost!" And Miriam looked with very good stage-scorn at Gabriel Nash. "It's he who thinks I'm bad."

"You say that to make me drive you home; you know it will," Nash returned.

"We'll all take you home; why not?" Sheringham asked.

Madame Carré looked at the handsome girl, handsomer than ever at this moment, and at the three young men who had taken their hats and stood ready to accompany her. A deeper expression came for an instant into her hard, bright eyes, while she sighed, "Ah, la jeunesse! you'd always have that, my child, if you were the greatest goose on earth!"

VIII.

AT Peter Sherringham's, the next day, Miriam Rooth had so evidently come with the expectation of "saying" something that it was impossible such a patron of the drama should forbear to invite her, little as the exhibition at Madame Carré's could have contributed to render the invitation prompt. His curiosity had been more appeased than stimulated, but he felt none the less that he had "taken up" the dark-browed girl and her reminiscential mother, and must face the immediate consequences of the act. This responsibility weighed upon him during the twenty-four hours that followed the ultimate dispersal of the little party at the door of the Hôtel de la Garonne.

On quitting Madame Carré's the two ladies had gracefully declined Mr. Nash's offered cab and had taken their way homeward on foot, with the gentlemen in attendance. The streets of Paris at that hour were bright and episodical, and Sherringham trod them good-humoredly enough, and not too fast, leaning a little to talk to the young lady as he went. Their pace was regulated by her mother's, who walked in advance, on the arm of Gabriel Nash (Nick Dormer was on her

other side), in refined deprecation. Her sloping back was before them, exempt from retentive stiffness in spite of her rigid principles, with the little drama of her lost and recovered shawl perpetually going on.

Sherringham said nothing to the girl about her performance or her powers; their talk was only of her manner of life with her mother — their travels, their *pensions*, their economies, their want of a home, the many cities she knew well, the foreign tongues and the wide view of the world she had acquired. He guessed easily enough the dolorous type of exile of the two ladies, wanderers in search of Continental cheapness, inured to queer contacts and compromises, "remarkably well connected" in England, but going out for their meals. The girl was but indirectly communicative, not, apparently, from any intention of concealment, but from the habit of associating with people whom she did n't honour with her confidence. She was fragmentary and abrupt, as well as not in the least shy, subdued to dread of Madame Carré as she had been for the time. She gave Sherringham a reason for this fear, and he thought her reason innocently pretentious. "She admired a great artist more than anything in the world; and in the presence of art, of *great* art, her heart beat so fast." Her manners were not perfect, and the friction of a varied experience had rather roughened than smoothed her. She said nothing that showed

that she was clever, though he guessed that this was the intention of two or three of her remarks; but he parted from her with the suspicion that she was, according to the contemporary French phrase, a "nature."

The Hôtel de la Garonne was in a small, unrenovated street, in which the cobble-stones of old Paris still flourished, lying between the Avenue de l'Opéra and the Place de la Bourse. Sherringham had occasionally passed through this dim by-way, but he had never noticed the tall, stale *maison meublée*, whose aspect, that of a third-rate provincial inn, was an illustration of Mrs. Rooth's shrunken standard.

"We would ask you to come up, but it's quite at the top, and we have n't a sitting-room," the poor lady bravely explained. "We had to receive Mr. Nash at a café."

Nick Dormer declared that he liked cafés, and Miriam, looking at his cousin, dropped, with a flash of passion, the demand: "Do you wonder that I should want to do something, so that we can stop living like pigs?"

Sherringham recognized eventually, the next day, that though it might be rather painful to listen to her it was better to make her recite than to let her do nothing, so effectually did the presence of his sister and that of Lady Agnes, and even of Grace and Biddy, appear, by a sort of tacit opposition, to deprive hers, ornamental as it was, of a reason. He had only to see them all

together to perceive that she could n't pass for having come to "meet" them—even her mother's insinuating gentility failed to put the occasion on that footing—and that she must therefore be assumed to have been brought to show them something. She was not subdued, not colorless enough to sit there for nothing, or even for conversation (the sort of conversation that was likely to come off), so that it was inevitable to treat her position as connected with the principal place on the carpet, with silence and attention and the pulling together of chairs. Even when so established it struck him at first as precarious, in the light, or the darkness, of the inexpressive faces of the other ladies, sitting in couples and rows on sofas (there were several in addition to Julia and the Dormers; mainly the wives, with their husbands, of Sherringham's fellow-secretaries), scarcely one of whom he felt that he might count upon to say something gushing when the girl should have finished.

Miss Rooth gave a representation of Juliet drinking her potion, according to the system, as her mother explained, of the famous Signor Ruggieri—a scene of high, fierce sound, of many cries and contortions: she shook her hair (which proved magnificent) half down before the performance was over. Then she declaimed several short poems by Victor Hugo, selected, among many hundred, by Mrs. Rooth, as the good lady was careful to make known. After this she

jumped to the American lyre, regaling the company with specimens, both familiar and fresh, of Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, and of two or three poetesses revealed to Sherringham on this occasion. She flowed so copiously, keeping the floor and rejoicing visibly in her opportunity, that Sherringham was mainly occupied with wondering how he could make her leave off. He was surprised at the extent of her repertory, which, in view of the circumstance that she could never have received much encouragement—it must have come mainly from her mother, and he did n't believe in Signor Ruggieri—denoted a very stiff ambition and a kind of illuminated perseverance. It was her mother who checked her at last, and he found himself suspecting that Gabriel Nash had intimated to the old woman that interference was necessary. For himself, he was chiefly glad that Madame Carré was not there. It was present to him that she would have deemed the exhibition, with its badness, its assurance, the absence of criticism, almost indecent.

His only new impression of the girl was that of this same high assurance—her coolness, her complacency, her eagerness to go on. She had been deadly afraid of the old actress, but she was not a bit afraid of a cluster of *femmes du monde*, of Julia, of Lady Agnes, of the smart women of the Embassy. It was positively these personages who were rather frightened; there was certainly a moment when even Julia was scared, for the

first time that he had ever seen her. The space was too small; the cries, the rushes of the disheveled girl were too near. Lady Agnes, much of the time, wore the countenance she might have worn at the theatre during a play in which pistols were fired; and indeed the manner of the young reciter had become more spasmodic, more explosive. It appeared, however, that the company in general thought her very clever and successful; which showed, to Sherringham's sense, how little they understood the matter. Poor Biddy was immensely struck, and grew flushed and absorbed in proportion as Miriam, at her best moments, became pale and fatal. It was she who spoke to her first, after it was agreed that they had better not fatigue her any more; she advanced a few steps, happening to be near her, murmuring, "Oh, thank you, thank you so much. I never saw anything so beautiful, so grand."

She looked very red and very pretty as she said this. Peter Sherringham liked her enough to notice and to like her better when she looked prettier than usual. As he turned away he heard Miriam answer, with rather an ungracious irrelevance: "I have seen you before, two days ago, at the Salon, with Mr. Dormer. Yes, I know he's your brother. I have made his acquaintance since. He wants to paint my portrait. Do you think he'll do it well?" He was afraid Miriam was something of a brute, and also somewhat grossly vain. This impression would perhaps

have been confirmed if a part of the rest of the short conversation of the two girls had reached his ear. Biddy ventured to remark that she herself had studied modeling a little and that she could understand how any artist would think Miss Rooth a splendid subject. If, indeed, *she* could attempt her head, that would be a chance to do something.

"Thank you," said Miriam, with a laugh. "I think I had rather not *passer par toute la famille* !" Then she added, "If your brother's an artist, I don't understand how he's in Parliament."

"Oh, he is n't in Parliament now; we only hope he will be."

"Oh, I see."

"And he is n't an artist, either," Biddy felt herself conscientiously bound to subjoin.

"Then he is n't anything," said Miss Rooth.

"Well — he's immensely clever."

"Oh, I see," Miss Rooth again replied. "Mr. Nash has puffed him up so."

"I don't know Mr. Nash," said Biddy, guilty of a little dryness, and also of a little misrepresentation, and feeling rather snubbed.

"Well, you need n't wish to."

Biddy stood with her a moment longer, still looking at her and not knowing what to say next, but not finding her any less handsome because she had such odd manners. Biddy had an ingenious little mind, which always tried as much as possible to keep different things separate. It was

pervaded now by the observation, made with a certain relief, that if the girl spoke to her with such unexpected familiarity of Nick, she said nothing at all about Peter. Two gentlemen came up, two of Peter's friends, and made speeches to Miss Rooth of the kind, Biddy supposed, that people learned to make in Paris. It was also doubtless in Paris, the girl privately reasoned, that they learned to listen to them as this striking performer listened. She received their advances very differently from the way she had received Biddy's. Sherringham noticed his young kinswoman turn away, still blushing, to go and sit near her mother again, leaving Miriam engaged with the two men. It appeared to have come over Biddy that for a moment she had been strangely spontaneous and bold and had paid a little of the penalty. The seat next her mother was occupied by Mrs. Rooth, toward whom Lady Agnes's head had inclined itself with a preoccupied air of benevolence. He had an idea that Mrs. Rooth was telling her about the Neville-Nugents of Castle Nugent, and that Lady Agnes was thinking it odd she never had heard of them. He said to himself that Biddy was generous. She had urged Julia to come, in order that they might see how bad the strange young woman would be; but now that she turned out so dazzling she forgot this calculation and rejoiced in what she innocently supposed to be her triumph. She kept away from Julia, however; she didn't even look

at her to invite her also to confess that, in vulgar parlance, they had been sold. He himself spoke to his sister, who was leaning back, in rather a detached way, in the corner of a sofa, saying something which led her to remark in reply, "Ah, I dare say it's extremely fine, but I don't care for tragedy when it treads on one's toes. She's like a cow who has kicked over the milking-pail. She ought to be tied up."

"My poor Julia, it is n't extremely fine; it is n't fine at all," Sherringham rejoined, with some irritation.

"Excuse me. I thought that was why you invited us."

"I thought she was different," Sherringham said.

"Ah, if you don't care for her, so much the better. It has always seemed to me that you make too much of those people."

"Oh, I do care for her in a way, too. She's interesting." His sister gave him a momentary mystified glance, and he added, "And she's awful!" He felt stupidly annoyed, and he was ashamed of his annoyance, for he could have assigned no reason for it. It did n't make it less, for the moment, to see Gabriel Nash approach Mrs. Dallow, introduced by Nick Dormer. He gave place to the two young men with a certain alacrity, for he had a sense of being put in the wrong, in respect to the heroine of the occasion, by Nash's very presence. He remembered that

it had been a part of their bargain, as it were, that he should present that gentleman to his sister. He was not sorry to be relieved of the office by Nick, and he even, tacitly and ironically, wished his cousin's friend joy of a colloquy with Mrs. Dallow. Sherringham's life was spent with people, he was used to people, and both as a host and as a guest he carried them, in general, lightly. He could observe, especially in the former capacity, without uneasiness, take the temperature without anxiety. But at present his company oppressed him; he felt himself nervous, which was the thing in the world that he had always held to be least an honour to a gentleman dedicated to diplomacy. He was vexed with the levity in himself which had made him call them together on so poor a pretext, and yet he was vexed with the stupidity in them which made them think, as they evidently did, that the pretext was sufficient. He inwardly groaned at the precipitancy with which he had saddled himself with the Tragic Muse (a tragic muse who was noisy and pert), and yet he wished his visitors would go away and leave him alone with her.

Nick Dormer said to Mrs. Dallow that he wanted her to know an old friend of his, one of the cleverest men he knew; and he added the hope that she would be gentle and encouraging with him: he was so timid and so easily disconcerted.

Gabriel Nash dropped into a chair by the arm

of Julia's sofa, Nick Dormer went away, and Mrs. Dallow turned her glance upon her new acquaintance without a perceptible change of position. Then she emitted, with rapidity, the remark, "It's very awkward when people are told one is clever."

"It's awkward if one is n't," said Mr. Nash, smiling.

"Yes, but so few people are — enough to be talked about."

"Is n't that just the reason why such a matter, such an exception, ought to be mentioned to them?" asked Gabriel Nash. "They might n't find it out for themselves. Of course, however, as you say, there ought to be a certainty; then they are surer to know it. Dormer's a dear fellow, but he's rash and superficial."

Mrs. Dallow at this turned her glance a second time upon her interlocutor; but during the rest of the conversation she rarely repeated the movement. If she liked Nick Dormer extremely (and it may without further delay be communicated to the reader that she did), her liking was of a kind that opposed no difficulty whatever to her not liking (in case of such a complication) a person attached or otherwise belonging to him. It was not in her nature to extend tolerances to others for the sake of an individual she loved: the tolerance was usually consumed in the loving; there was nothing left over. If the affection that isolates and simplifies its object may be distin-

guished from the affection that seeks communications and contacts for it, Julia Dallow's belonged wholly to the former class. She was not so much jealous as rigidly direct. She desired no experience for the familiar and yet partly mysterious kinsman in whom she took an interest that she would not have desired for herself; and, indeed, the cause of her interest in him was partly the vision of his helping her to the particular emotion that she did desire — the emotion of great affairs and of public action. To have such ambitions for him appeared to her the greatest honour she could do him; her conscience was in it as well as her inclination, and her scheme, in her conception, was noble enough to varnish over any disdain she might feel for forces drawing him another way. She had a prejudice, in general, against his connections, a suspicion of them and a supply of unwrought contempt ready for them. It was a singular circumstance that she was skeptical even when, knowing her as well as he did, he thought them worth recommending to her: the recommendation, indeed, inveterately confirmed the suspicion.

This was a law from which Gabriel Nash was condemned to suffer, if suffering could on any occasion be predicated of Gabriel Nash. His pretension was, in truth, that he had purged his life of such incongruities, though probably he would have admitted that if a sore spot remained the hand of a woman would be sure to touch it.

In dining with her brother and with the Dormers, two evenings before, Mrs. Dallow had been moved to exclaim that Peter and Nick knew the most extraordinary people. As regards Peter the attitudinizing girl and her mother now pointed that moral with sufficient vividness ; so that there was little arrogance in taking a similar quality for granted in the conceited man at her elbow, who sat there as if he would be capable, from one moment to another, of leaning over the arm of her sofa. She had not the slightest wish to talk with him about himself, and was afraid, for an instant, that he was on the point of passing from the chapter of his cleverness to that of his timidity. It was a false alarm, however, for instead of this he said something about the pleasures of the monologue, as the distraction that had just been offered was called by the French. He intimated that in his opinion these pleasures were mainly for the performers. They had all, at any rate, given Miss Rooth a charming afternoon ; that, of course, was what Mrs. Dallow's kind brother had mainly intended in arranging the little party. (Mrs. Dallow hated to hear him call her brother "kind:" the term seemed offensively patronizing.) But he himself, he related, was now constantly employed in the same beneficence, listening, two thirds of his time, to "intonations" and shrieks. She had doubtless observed it herself, how the great current of the age, the adoration of the mime, was almost too strong for any indi-

vidual ; how it swept one along and hurled one against the rocks. As she made no response to this proposition Gabriel Nash asked her if she had not been struck with the main sign of the time, the preponderance of the mountebank, the glory and renown, the personal favor, that he enjoyed. Hadn't she noticed what an immense part of the public attention he held, in London at least ? For in Paris society was not so pervaded with him, and the women of the profession, in particular, were not in every drawing-room.

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Dallow said. "I know nothing of any such people."

"Aren't they under your feet wherever you turn — their performances, their portraits, their speeches, their autobiographies, their names, their manners, their ugly mugs, as the people say, and their idiotic pretensions ?"

"I dare say it depends on the places one goes to. If they're everywhere" — and Mrs. Dallow paused a moment — "I don't go everywhere."

"I don't go anywhere, but they mount on my back, at home, like the Old Man of the Sea. Just observe a little when you return to London," Nash continued, with friendly instructiveness. Mrs. Dallow got up at this — she didn't like receiving directions ; but no other corner of the room appeared to offer her any particular reason for crossing to it : she never did such a thing without a great inducement. So she remained standing there, as if she were quitting the place

in a moment, which indeed she now determined to do ; and her interlocutor, rising also, lingered beside her, unencouraged but unperturbed. He went on to remark that Mr. Sherringham was quite right to offer Miss Rooth an afternoon's sport ; she deserved it as a fine, brave, amiable girl. She was highly educated, knew a dozen languages, was of illustrious lineage, and was immensely particular.

" Immensely particular ? " Mrs. Dallow repeated.

" Perhaps I should say that her mother is, on her behalf. Particular about the sort of people they meet — the tone, the standard. I'm bound to say, they're like you : they don't go everywhere. That spirit is meritorious ; it should be recognized and rewarded."

Mrs. Dallow said nothing for a moment ; she looked vaguely round the room, but not at Miriam Rooth. Nevertheless she presently dropped, in allusion to her, the words, " She's dreadfully vulgar."

" Ah, don't say that to my friend Dormer ! " Gabriel Nash exclaimed.

" Are you and he such great friends ? " Mrs. Dallow asked, looking at him.

" Great enough to make me hope we shall be greater."

Again, for a moment, she said nothing ; then she went on —

" Why should n't I say to him that she's vulgar ? "

"Because he admires her so much ; he wants to paint her."

"To paint her ?"

"To paint her portrait."

"Oh, I see. I dare say she'd do for that."

Gabriel Nash laughed gayly. "If that's your opinion of her, you are not very complimentary to the art he aspires to practice."

"He aspires to practice?" Mrs. Dallow repeated.

"Have n't you talked with him about it? Ah, you must keep him up to it!"

Julia Dallow was conscious, for a moment, of looking uncomfortable ; but it relieved her to demand of her neighbor, in a certain tone, "Are you an artist?"

"I try to be," Nash replied, smiling ; "but I work in such a difficult material."

He spoke this with such a clever suggestion of unexpected reference that, in spite of herself, Mrs. Dallow said after him —

"Difficult material?"

"I work in life!"

At this Mrs. Dallow turned away, leaving Nash the impression that she probably misunderstood his speech, thinking he meant that he drew from the living model, or some such platitude : as if there could have been any likelihood that he drew from the dead one. This, indeed, would not fully have explained the abruptness with which she dropped their conversation. Gabriel

Nash, however, was used to sudden collapses, and even to sudden ruptures, on the part of his interlocutors, and no man had more the secret of remaining gracefully with his ideas on his hands. He saw Mrs. Dallow approach Nick Dormer, who was talking with one of the ladies of the Embassy, and apparently signify to him that she wished to speak to him. He got up, they had a minute's conversation, and then he turned and took leave of his fellow-visitors. Mrs. Dallow said a word to her brother, Dormer joined her, and then they came together to the door. In this movement they had to pass near Nash, and it gave her an opportunity to nod good-by to him, which he was by no means sure she would have done if Nick had not been with her. The young man stopped a moment; he said to Nash: "I should like to see you this evening, late; you must meet me somewhere."

"We'll take a walk — I should like that," Nash replied. "I shall smoke a cigar at the café on the corner of the Place de l'Opéra; you'll find me there." Gabriel prepared to compass his own departure, but before doing so he addressed himself to the duty of saying a few words of civility to Lady Agnes. This proved difficult, for on one side she was defended by the wall of the room and on the other rendered inaccessible by Miriam's mother, who clung to her with a quickly-rooted fidelity, showing no symptom of

desistance. Gabriel compromised on her daughter Grace, who said to him :

"You were talking with my cousin, Mrs. Dallow."

"To her rather than with her," Nash smiled.

"Ah, she's very charming," said Grace.

"She's very beautiful," Nash rejoined.

"And very clever," Miss Dormer continued.

"Very, very intelligent." His conversation with the young lady went little further than this, and he presently took leave of Peter Sherringham ; remarking to him, as he shook hands, that he was very sorry for him. But he had courted his fate.

"What do you mean by my fate?" Sherringham asked.

"You've got them for life."

"Why for life, when I now lucidly and courageously recognize that she is n't good?"

"Ah, but she'll become so," said Gabriel Nash.

"Do you think that?" Sherringham inquired, with a candor which made his visitors laugh.

"You will — that's more to the purpose!" Gabriel exclaimed, as he went away.

Ten minutes later Lady Agnes substituted a general vague assent for all further particular ones, and withdrew from Mrs. Rooth, and from the rest of the company, with her daughters. Peter had had very little talk with Biddy, but the

girl kept her disappointment out of her pretty eyes and said to him :

“You told us she did n’t know how — but she does !” There was no suggestion of disappointment in this.

Sherringham held her hand a moment. “Ah, it’s you who know how, dear Biddy !” he answered ; and he was conscious that if the occasion had been more private he would have lawfully kissed her.

Presently three others of his guests departed, and Mr. Nash’s assurance that he had them for life recurred to him as he observed that Mrs. Rooth and her daughter quite failed to profit by so many examples. The Lovicks remained — a colleague and his sociable wife — and Peter gave them a hint that they were not to leave him absolutely alone with the two ladies. Miriam quit-
ted Mrs. Lovick, who had attempted, with no great subtlety, to engage her, and came up to Sherringham as if she suspected him of a design of stealing from the room and had the idea of preventing it.

“I want some more tea : will you give me some more ? I feel quite faint. You don’t seem to suspect how that sort of thing takes it out of you.”

Sherringham apologized, extravagantly, for not having seen that she had the proper quantity of refreshment, and took her to the round table, in a corner, on which the little collation had been

served. He poured out tea for her, and pressed bread and butter on her and *petits fours*, of all which she profusely and methodically partook. It was late; the afternoon had faded and a lamp had been brought in, the wide shade of which shed a fair glow upon the tea-service, the little plates of comestibles. The Lovicks sat with Mrs. Rooth at the other end of the room, and the girl stood at the table, drinking her tea and eating her bread and butter. She consumed these articles so freely that he wondered if she had been in serious want of food — if they were so poor as to have to count with that sort of privation. This supposition was softening, but still not so much so as to make him ask her to sit down. She appeared indeed to prefer to stand: she looked better so, as if the freedom, the conspicuity of being on her feet and treading a stage were agreeable to her. While Sherringham lingered near her, vaguely, with his hands in his pockets, not knowing exactly what to say and instinctively avoiding, now, the theatrical question (there were moments when he was plentifully tired of it), she broke out, abruptly: "Confess that you think me intolerably bad!"

"Intolerably — no."

"Only tolerably! I think that's worse."

"Every now and then you do something very clever," Sherringham said.

"How many such things did I do to-day?"

"Oh, three or four. I don't know that I counted very carefully."

She raised her cup to her lips, looking at him over the rim of it — a proceeding which gave her eyes a strange expression. “It bores you, and you think it disagreeable,” she said in a moment — “a girl always talking about herself.” He protested that she could never bore him, and she went on: “Oh, I don’t want compliments — I want the truth. An actress has to talk about herself; what else can she talk about, poor vain thing?”

“She can talk sometimes about other actresses.”

“That comes to the same thing. You won’t be serious. I’m awfully serious.” There was something that caught his attention in the way she said this — a longing, half hopeless, half argumentative, to be believed in. “If one really wants to do anything, one must worry it out; of course everything doesn’t come the first day,” she pursued. “I can’t see everything at once; but I can see a little more — step by step — as I go: can’t I?”

“That’s the way — that’s the way,” said Sheringham. “If you see the things to do, the art of doing them will come, if you hammer away. The great point is to see them.”

“Yes; and you don’t think me clever enough for that.”

“Why do you say so, when I’ve asked you to come here, on purpose?”

"You've asked me to come, but I've had no success."

"On the contrary; every one thought you wonderful."

"Oh, they don't know!" said Miriam Rooth. "You've not said a word to me. I don't mind your not having praised me; that would be too *banal*. But if I'm bad — and I know I'm dreadful — I wish you would talk to me about it."

"It's delightful to talk to you," Sherringham said.

"No, it isn't, but it's kind," she answered, looking away from him.

Her voice had a quality, as she uttered these words, which made him exclaim, "Every now and then you say something —!"

She turned her eyes back to him, smiling. "I don't want it to come by accident." Then she added: "If there's any good to be got from trying, from showing one's self, how can it come unless one hears the simple truth, the truth that turns one inside out? It's all for that — to know what one is, if one's a stick!"

"You have great courage, you have rare qualities," said Sherringham. She had begun to touch him, to seem different: he was glad she had not gone.

For a moment she made no response to this, putting down her empty cup and looking vaguely over the table, as if to select something more to

eat. Suddenly she raised her head and broke out with vehemence, "I will, I will, I will!"

"You'll do what you want, evidently."

"I will succeed — I will be great. Of course I know too little, I've seen too little. But I've always liked it; I've never liked anything else. I used to learn things, and to do scenes, and to rant about the room, when I was five years old." She went on, communicative, persuasive, familiar, egotistical (as was necessary), and slightly common, or perhaps only natural; with reminiscences, reasons and anecdotes, an unexpected profusion, and with an air of comradeship, of freedom of intercourse, which appeared to plead that she was capable at least of embracing that side of the profession she desired to adopt. He perceived that if she had seen very little, as she said, she had also seen a great deal; but both her experience and her innocence had been accidental and irregular. She had seen very little acting — the theatre was always too expensive. If she could only go often — in Paris, for instance, every night for six months — to see the best, the worst, everything, she would make things out, she would observe and learn, what to do, what not to do: it would be a kind of school. But she could n't, without selling the clothes off her back. It was vile and disgusting to be poor; and if ever she were to know the bliss of having a few francs in her pocket, she would make up for it — that she could promise! She had never been acquainted with any one who

could tell her anything — if it was good or bad, or right or wrong — except Mrs. Delamere and poor Ruggieri. She supposed they had told her a great deal, but perhaps they had n't, and she was perfectly willing to give it up if it was bad. Evidently Madame Carré thought so ; she thought it was horrid. Was n't it perfectly divine, the way the old woman had said those verses, those speeches of Célie ? If she would only let her come and listen to her once in a while, like that, it was all she would ask. She had got lots of ideas, just from that ; she had practiced them over, over and over again, the moment she got home. He might ask her mother — he might ask the people next door. If Madame Carré did n't think she could work, she might have heard something that would show her. But she did n't think her even good enough to criticise ; for that was n't criticism, telling her her head was good. Of course her head was good ; she did n't need to travel up to the *quartiers excentrique* to find that out. It was her mother, the way she talked, who gave that idea, that she wanted to be elegant, and moral, and a *femme du monde*, and all that sort of trash. Of course that put people off, when they were only thinking of the right way. Did n't *she* know, Miriam herself, that that was the only thing to think of ? But any one would be kind to her mother who knew what a dear she was. "She does n't know when it's right or wrong, but she's a perfect saint," said the girl, obscuring consid-

erably her vindication. "She does n't mind when I say things over by the hour, dinning them into her ears while she sits there and reads. She's a tremendous reader; she's awfully up in literature. She taught me everything herself. I mean all that sort of thing. Of course I'm not so fond of reading; I go in for the book of life." Sherringham wondered whether her mother had not, at any rate, taught her that phrase, and thought it highly probable. "It would give on *my* nerves, the life I lead her," Miriam continued; "but she's really a delicious woman."

The oddity of this epithet made Sherringham laugh, and altogether, in a few minutes, which is perhaps a sign that he abused his right to be a man of moods, the young lady had produced a revolution of curiosity in him, reawakened his sympathy. Her mixture, as it spread itself before one, was a quickening spectacle: she was intelligent and clumsy — she was underbred and fine. Certainly she was very various, and that was rare; not at all, at this moment, the heavy-eyed, frightened creature who had pulled herself together with such an effort at Madame Carré's, nor the elated "phenomenon" who had just been declaiming, nor the rather affected and contradictory young person with whom he had walked home from the Rue de Constantinople. Was this succession of phases a sign that she really possessed the celebrated artistic temperament, the nature that made people pro-

voking and interesting? That Sherringham himself was of that shifting complexion is perhaps proved by his odd capacity for being of two different minds at very nearly the same time. Miriam was pretty now, with likeable looks and charming usual eyes. Yes, there were things he could do for her; he had already forgotten the chill of Mr. Nash's irony, of his prophecy. He was even scarcely conscious how much, in general, he detested hints, insinuations, favours asked obliquely and plaintively: that was doubtless also because the girl was so pretty and so fraternizing. Perhaps, indeed, it was unjust to qualify it as roundabout, the manner in which Miss Rooth conveyed to him that it was open to him not only to pay for lessons for her, but to meet the expense of her nightly attendance, with her mother, at instructive exhibitions of theatrical art. It was a large order, sending the pair to all the plays; but what Sherringham now found himself thinking about was not so much its largeness as that it would be rather interesting to go with them sometimes and point the moral (the technical one), showing her the things he liked, the things he disapproved. She repeated her declaration that she recognized the fallacy of her mother's views about "noble" heroines and about the importance of her looking out for such tremendously proper people. "One must let her talk, but of course it creates a prejudice," she said, with her eyes on Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, who had got up, terminat-

ing their communion with Mrs. Rooth. "It's a great muddle, I know, but she can't bear anything coarse — and quite right, too. I should n't, either, if I did n't have to. But I don't care where I go if I can act, or who they are if they'll help me. I want to act — that's what I want to do; I don't want to meddle in people's affairs. I can look out for myself — *I'm all right!*" the girl exclaimed, roundly, frankly, with a ring of honesty which made her crude and pure. "As for doing the bad ones, I'm not afraid of that."

"The bad ones?"

"The bad women, in the plays — like Madame Carré. I'll do anything."

"I think you'll do best what you are," remarked Sherringham, laughing. "You're a strange girl."

"Je crois bien! Does n't one have to be, to want to go and exhibit one's self to a loathsome crowd, on a platform, with trumpets and a big drum, for money — to parade one's body and one's soul?"

Sherringham looked at her a moment: her face changed constantly; now there was a little flush and a noble delicacy in it.

"Give it up; you're too good for it," he said, abruptly.

"Never, never — never till I'm pelted!"

"Then stay on here a bit; I'll take you to the theatres."

"Oh, you dear!" Miriam delightedly exclaimed. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick, accompanied by Mrs. Rooth, now crossed the room to them, and the girl went on, in the same tone: "Mamma, dear, he's the best friend we've ever had; he's a great deal nicer than I thought."

"So are you, mademoiselle," said Peter Sherringham.

"Oh, I trust Mr. Sherringham—I trust him infinitely," Mrs. Rooth returned, covering him with her mild, respectable, wheedling eyes. "The kindness of every one has been beyond everything. Mr. and Mrs. Lovick can't say enough. They make the most obliging offers; they want you to know their brother."

"Oh, I say, he's no brother of mine," Mr. Lovick protested, good-naturedly.

"They think he'll be so suggestive, he'll put us up to the right things," Mrs. Rooth went on.

"It's just a little brother of mine—such a dear, clever boy," Mrs. Lovick explained.

"Do you know she has got nine? Upon my honor she has!" said her husband. "This one is the sixth. Fancy if I had to take them over!"

"Yes, it makes it rather awkward," Mrs. Lovick amiably conceded. "He has gone on the stage, poor dear boy; he acts rather well."

"He tried for the diplomatic service, but he did n't precisely dazzle his examiners," Mr. Lovick remarked.

"Edmund's very nasty about him. There are lots of gentlemen on the stage; he's not the first."

"It's such a comfort to hear that," said Mrs. Rooth.

"I'm much obliged to you. Has he got a theatre?" Miriam asked.

"My dear young lady, he has n't even got an engagement," replied the young man's unsympathizing brother-in-law.

"He has n't been at it very long, but I'm sure he'll get on. He's immensely in earnest, and he's very good-looking. I just said that if he should come over to see us you might rather like to meet him. He might give you some tips, as my husband says."

"I don't care for his looks, but I *should* like his tips," said Miriam, smiling.

"And *is* he coming over to see you?" asked Sherringham, to whom, while this exchange of remarks, which he had not lost, was going on, Mrs. Rooth had, in lowered accents, addressed herself.

"Not if I can help it, I think!" Mr. Lovick declared, but so jocosely that it was not embarrassing.

"Oh, sir, I'm sure you're fond of him," Mrs. Rooth remonstrated, as the party passed together into the ante-chamber.

"No, really, I like some of the others — four or five of them; but I don't like Arty."

“We ’ll make it up to him, then ; *we* ’ll like him,” Miriam declared, gayly : and her voice rang in the staircase (Sherringham went a little way with them), with a charm which her host had not perceived in her sportive note the day before.

IX.

NICK DORMER found his friend Nash, that evening, on the spot he had designated, smoking a cigar in the warm, bright night, in front of the café at the corner of the square before the Opéra. He sat down with him, but at the end of five minutes he uttered a protest against the crush and confusion, the publicity and vulgarity of the place, the shuffling procession of the crowd, the jostle of fellow-customers, the perpetual brush of waiters. "Come away. I want to talk to you, and I can't talk here," he said to his companion. "I don't care where we go. It will be pleasant to walk; we'll stroll away to the *quartiers sérieux*. Each time I come to Paris, at the end of three days, I take the boulevard, with its conventional grimace, into greater disfavour. I hate even to cross it, and go half a mile round to avoid it."

The young men took their course together down the Rue de la Paix to the Rue de Rivoli, which they crossed, passing beside the gilded railing of the Tuileries. The beauty of the night — the only defect of which was that the immense illumination of Paris kept it from being quite night enough, made it a sort of bedizened, rejuvenated day — gave a charm to the quieter

streets, drew our friends away to the right, to the river and the bridges, the older, duskier city. The pale ghost of the palace that had died by fire hung over them awhile, and, by the passage now open at all times across the garden of the Tuileries, they came out upon the Seine. They kept on and on, moving slowly, smoking, talking, pausing, stopping to look, to emphasize, to compare. They fell into discussion, into confidence, into inquiry, sympathetic or satiric, and into explanation which needed in turn to be explained. The balmly night, the time for talk, the amusement of Paris, the memory of young confabulations gave a quality to the occasion. Nick had already forgotten the little brush he had had with Mrs. Dallo, when they quitted Peter's tea-party together, and that he had been almost disconcerted by the manner in which she characterized the odious man he had taken it into his head to present to her. Impertinent and fatuous she had called him; and when Nick began to explain that he was really neither of these things, though he could imagine his manner might sometimes suggest them, she had declared that she did n't wish to argue about him or ever to hear of him again. Nick had not counted on her liking Gabriel Nash, but he had thought it would n't matter much if she should dislike him a little. He had given himself the diversion, which he had not dreamed would be cruel to any one concerned, of seeing what she would make of a type she had never

encountered before. She had made even less than he expected, and her implication that he had played her a trick had been irritating enough to prevent him from reflecting that the fault might have been in some degree with Nash. But he had recovered from his resentment sufficiently to ask this personage, with every possible circumstance of implied consideration for the lady, what *he*, on his side, had made of his charming cousin.

"Upon my word, my dear fellow, I don't regard that as a fair question," was the answer. "Besides, if you think Mrs. Dallow charming, what on earth need it matter to you what I think? The superiority of one man's opinion over another's is never so great as when the opinion is about a woman."

"It was to help me to find out what I think of yourself," said Nick Dormer.

"Oh, that you'll never do. I shall bother you to the end. The lady with whom you were so good as to make me acquainted is a beautiful specimen of the English garden-flower, the product of high cultivation and much tending; a tall, delicate stem, with the head set upon it in a manner which, as I recall it, is distinctly so much to the good in my day. She's the perfect type of the object *raised*, or bred, and everything about her is homogeneous, from the angle of her elbow to the way she drops that vague, conventional, dry little 'Oh!' which dispenses with all further performance. That sort of completeness is al-

ways satisfying. But I did n't satisfy her, and she did n't understand me. I don't think they usually understand."

"She's no worse than I, then."

"Ah, she did n't try."

"No, she does n't try. But she probably thought you conceited, and she would think so still more if she were to hear you talk about her trying."

"Very likely — very likely," said Gabriel Nash. "I have an idea a good many people think that. It appears to me so droll. I suppose it's a result of my little system."

"Your little system?"

"Oh, it's nothing wonderful. Only the idea of being just the same to every one. People have so bemuddled themselves that the last thing they can conceive is that one should be simple."

"Lord, do you call yourself simple?" Nick ejaculated.

"Absolutely; in the sense of having no interest of my own to push, no nostrum to advertise, no power to conciliate, no axe to grind. I'm not a savage — ah, far from it — but I really think I'm perfectly independent."

"Oh, that's always provoking!" laughed Nick.

"So it would appear, to the great majority of one's fellow-mortals; and I well remember the pang with which I originally made that discovery. It darkened my spirit, at a time when I had no thought of evil. What we like, when we are un-

regenerate, is that a newcomer should give us a password, come over to our side, join our little camp or religion, get into our little boat, in short, whatever it is, and help us to row it. It's natural enough ; we are mostly in different tubs and cockles, paddling for life. Our opinions, our convictions and doctrines and standards, are simply the particular thing that will make the boat go — *our* boat, naturally, for they may very often be just the thing that will sink another. If you won't get in, people generally hate you."

"Your metaphor is very lame," said Nick ; "it's the overcrowded boat that goes to the bottom."

"Oh, I'll give it another leg or two ! Boats can be big, in the infinite of space, and a doctrine is a raft that floats the better the more passengers it carries. A passenger jumps over from time to time, not so much from fear of sinking as from a want of interest in the course or the company. He swims, he plunges, he dives, he dips down and visits the fishes and the mermaids and the submarine caves ; he goes from craft to craft, and splashes about, on his own account, in the blue, cool water. The regenerate, as I call them, are the passengers who jump over, in search of better fun. I turned my somersault long ago."

"And now, of course, you're at the head of the regenerate ; for, in your turn, you all form a select school of porpoises."

"Not a bit, and I know nothing about heads, in the sense you mean. I've grown a tail, if you

will ; I'm the merman wandering free. It's a delightful trade ! ”

Before they had gone many steps further Nick Dormer stopped short, and said to his companion : “ I say, my dear fellow, do you mind mentioning to me whether you are the greatest humbug and charlatan on earth, or a genuine intelligence, one that has sifted things for itself ? ”

“ I do puzzle you — I'm so sorry,” Nash replied, benignly. “ But I'm very sincere. And I *have* tried to straighten out things a bit for myself.”

“ Then why do you give people such a handle ? ”

“ Such a handle ? ”

“ For thinking you're an — for thinking you're not wise.”

“ I dare say it's my manner ; they're so unused to candour.”

“ Why don't you try another ? ” Nick inquired.

“ One has the manner that one can ; and mine, moreover, is a part of my little system.”

“ Ah, if you've got a little system, you're no better than any one else,” said Nick going on.

“ I don't pretend to be better, for we are all miserable sinners ; I only pretend to be bad in a pleasanter, brighter way, by what I can see. It's the simplest thing in the world ; I just take for granted a certain brightness in life, a certain frankness. What is essentially kinder than that,

what is more harmless? But the tradition of dreariness, of stodginess, of dull, dense, literal prose, has so sealed people's eyes that they have ended by thinking the most normal thing in the world the most fantastic. Why be dreary, in our little day? No one can tell me why, and almost every one calls me names for simply asking the question. But I keep on, for I believe one can do a little good by it. I want so much to do a little good," Gabriel Nash continued, taking his companion's arm. "My persistence is systematic: don't you see what I mean? I won't be dreary — no, no, no; and I won't recognize the necessity, or even, if there is any way out of it, the accident of dreariness in the life that surrounds me. That's enough to make people stare: they're so stupid!"

"They think you're impertinent," Dormer remarked.

At this his companion stopped him short, with an ejaculation of pain, and, turning his eyes, Nick saw under the lamps of the quay that he had brought a vivid blush into Nash's face. "I don't strike *you* that way?" Gabriel asked, reproachfully.

"Oh, me! Wasn't it just admitted that I don't in the least make you out?"

"That's the last thing!" Nash murmured, as if he were thinking the idea over, with an air of genuine distress. "But with a little patience we'll clear it up together, if you care enough

about it," he added more cheerfully. He let his friend go on again, and he continued : " Heaven help us all ! what do people mean by impertinence ? There are many, I think, who don't understand its nature or its limits ; and upon my word, I have literally seen mere quickness of intelligence or of perception, the jump of a step or two, a little whirr of the wings of talk, mistaken for it. Yes, I have encountered men and women who thought you were impertinent if you were not so stupid as they. The only impertinence is aggression, and I indignantly protest that I am never guilty of *that* clumsiness. Ah, for what do they take one, with *their* presumptions ? Even to defend myself, sometimes, I have to make believe to myself that I care. I always feel as if I did n't successfully make others think so. Perhaps they see an impertinence in that. But I dare say the offense is in the things that I take, as I say, for granted ; for if one tries to be pleased, one passes, perhaps inevitably, for being pleased above all with one's self. That's really not my case, for I find my capacity for pleasure deplorably below the mark I've set. That's why, as I have told you, I cultivate it, I try to bring it up. And I am actuated by positive benevolence ; I have that pretension. That's what I mean by being the same to every one, by having only one manner. If one is conscious and ingenious to that end, what's the harm, when one's motives are so pure ? By never, *never* making the concession,

one may end by becoming a perceptible force for good."

"What concession are you talking about?" asked Nick Dormer.

"Why, that we are only here for dreariness. It's impossible to grant it sometimes, if you wish to withhold it ever."

"And what do you mean by dreariness? That's modern slang, and it's terribly vague. Many good things are dreary—virtue and decency and charity, and perseverance and courage and honour."

"Say at once that life is dreary, my dear fellow!" Gabriel Nash exclaimed.

"That's on the whole my most usual impression."

"C'est là que je vous attends! I'm precisely engaged in trying what can be done in taking it the other way. It's my little personal experiment. Life consists of the personal experiments of each of us, and the point of an experiment is that it shall succeed. What we contribute is our treatment of the material, our rendering of the text, our style. A sense of the qualities of a style is so rare that many persons should doubtless be forgiven for not being able to read, or at all events to enjoy us; but is that a reason for giving it up—for not being, in this other sphere, if one possibly can, a Macaulay, a Ruskin, a Renan? Ah, we must write our best; it's the great thing we can do in the world, on the right

side. One has one's form, *que diable*, and a mighty good thing that one has. I'm not afraid of putting all life into mine, without unduly squeezing it. I'm not afraid of putting in honour and courage and charity, without spoiling them: on the contrary, I'll only do them good. People may not read you at sight, may not like you, but there's a chance they'll come round; and the only way to court the chance is to keep it up — always to keep it up. That's what I do, my dear fellow, if you don't think I've perseverance. If some one likes it here and there, if you give a little impression of solidity, that's your reward; besides, of course, the pleasure for yourself."

"Don't you think your style is a little affected?" Nick asked, laughing, as they proceeded.

"That's always the charge against a personal manner; if you have any at all, people think you have too much. Perhaps, perhaps — who can say? Of course one is n't perfect; but that's the delightful thing about art, that there is always more to learn and more to do; one can polish and polish, and refine and refine. No doubt I'm rough still, but I'm in the right direction: I make it my business to take for granted an interest in the beautiful."

"Ah, the beautiful — there it stands, over there!" said Nick Dormer. "I am not so sure about yours — I don't know what I've got hold of. But Notre Dame *is* solid; Notre Dame *is*

wise ; on Notre Dame the distracted mind can rest. Come over and look at her ! ”

They had come abreast of the low island from which the great cathedral, disengaged to-day from her old contacts and adhesions, rises high and fair, with her front of beauty and her majestic mass, darkened at that hour, or at least simplified, under the stars, but only more serene and sublime for her happy union, far aloft, with the cool distance and the night. Our young men, gossiping as profitably as I leave the reader to estimate, crossed the wide, short bridge which made them face toward the monuments of old Paris — the Palais de Justice, the Conciergerie, the holy chapel of Saint Louis. They came out before the church, which looks down on a square where the past, once so thick in the very heart of Paris, has been made rather a blank, pervaded, however, by the everlasting freshness of the great cathedral-face. It greeted Nick Dormer and Gabriel Nash with a kindness which the centuries had done nothing to dim. The lamplight of the great city washed its foundations, but the towers and buttresses, the arches, the galleries, the statues, the vast rose-window, the large, full composition, seemed to grow clearer as they climbed higher, as if they had a conscious benevolent answer for the upward gaze of men.

“ How it straightens things out and blows away one’s vapors — anything that’s *done* ! ” said Nick ; while his companion exclaimed, blandly and affectionately :

"The dear old thing!"

"The great point is to do something, instead of muddling and questioning; and, by Jove, it makes me want to!"

"Want to build a cathedral?" Nash inquired.

"Yes, just that."

"It's you who puzzle *me*, then, my dear fellow. You can't build them out of words."

"What is it the great poets do?" asked Nick.

"*Their* words are ideas — their words are images, enchanting collocations and unforgettable signs. But the verbiage of parliamentary speeches!"

"Well," said Nick, with a candid, reflective sigh, "You can rear a great structure of many things—not only of stones and timbers and painted glass." They walked round Notre Dame, pausing, criticising, admiring and discussing; mingling the grave with the gay and paradox with contemplation. Behind and at the sides, the huge dusky vessel of the church seemed to dip into the Seine, or rise out of it, floating expansively—a ship of stone, with its flying buttresses thrown forth like an array of mighty oars. Nick Dormer lingered near it with joy, with a certain soothing content; as if it had been the temple of a faith so dear to him that there was peace and security in its precinct. And there was comfort, too, and consolation of the same sort, in the company, at this moment, of Nash's equal response, of his appreciation, exhibited by his own

signs, of the great effect. He felt it so freely and uttered his impression with such vividness that Nick was reminded of the luminosity his boyish admiration had found in him of old, the natural intelligence of everything of that kind. "Everything of that kind" was, in Nick's mind, the description of a wide and bright domain.

They crossed to the further side of the river, where the influence of the Gothic monument threw a distinction even over the Parisian smartnesses — the municipal rule and measure, the importunate symmetries, the "handsomeness" of everything, the extravagance of gaslight, the perpetual click on the neat bridges. In front of a quiet little café on the right bank, Gabriel Nash said, "Let's sit down" — he was always ready to sit down. It was a friendly establishment and an unfashionable quarter, far away from the Grand Hôtel; there were the usual little tables and chairs on the quay, the muslin curtains behind the glazed front, the general sense of sawdust and of drippings of watery beer. The place was subdued to stillness, but not extinguished, by the lateness of the hour; no vehicles passed, but only, now and then, a light Parisian foot. Beyond the parapet they could hear the flow of the Seine. Nick Dormer said it made him think of the old Paris, of the great Revolution, of Madame Roland, *quoi!* Gabriel Nash said they could have watery beer, but were not obliged to drink it. They sat a long time; they talked a great

deal, and the more they said the more the unsaid came up. Presently Nash found occasion to remark, "I go about my business, like any good citizen — that 's all."

"And what *is* your business?"

"The spectacle of the world."

Nick laughed out. "And what do you do with that?"

"What does any one do with spectacles? I look at it."

"You are full of contradictions and inconsistencies. You described yourself to me half an hour ago as an apostle of beauty."

"Where is the inconsistency? I do it in the broad light of day, whatever I do: that's virtually what I meant. If I look at the spectacle of the world I look in preference at what is charming in it. Sometimes I have to go far to find it — very likely; but that's just what I do. I go far — as far as my means permit me. Last year I heard of such a delightful little spot; a place where a wild fig-tree grows in the south wall, the outer side, of an old Spanish city. I was told it was a deliciously brown corner, with the sun making it warm in winter! As soon as I could I went there."

"And what did you do?"

"I lay on the first green grass — I liked it."

"If that sort of thing is all you accomplish, you are not encouraging."

"I accomplish my happiness — it seems to me

that's something. I have feelings, I have sensations: let me tell you that's not so common. It's rare to have them; and if you chance to have them it's rare not to be ashamed of them. I go after them — when I judge they won't hurt any one."

"You're lucky to have money for your traveling-expenses," said Nick.

"No doubt, no doubt; but I do it very cheap. I take my stand on my nature, on my disposition. I'm not ashamed of it, I don't think it's so horrible, my disposition. But we've befogged and befouled so the whole question of liberty, of spontaneity, of good-humor and inclination and enjoyment, that there's nothing that makes people stare so as to see one natural."

"You are always thinking too much of 'people.'"

"They say I think too little," Gabriel smiled.

"Well, I've agreed to stand for Harsh," said Nick, with a roundabout transition.

"It's you, then, who are lucky to have money."

"I have n't," Nick replied. "My expenses are to be paid."

"Then you too must think of 'people.'"

Nick made no answer to this, but after a moment he said, "I wish very much you had more to show for it."

"To show for what?"

"Your little system — the æsthetic life."

Nash hesitated, tolerantly, gayly, as he often

did, with an air of being embarrassed to choose between several answers, any one of them would be so right. "Oh, having something to show is such a poor business. It's a kind of confession of failure."

"Yes, you're more affected than anything else," said Nick impatiently.

"No, my dear boy, I'm more good-natured: don't I prove it? I'm rather disappointed to find that you are not worthy of the esoteric doctrine. But there is, I confess, another plane of intelligence, honorable, and very honorable in its way, from which it *may* legitimately appear important to have something to show. If you *must* confine yourself to that plane, I won't refuse you my sympathy. After all, that's what *I* have to show! But the degree of my sympathy must of course depend on the nature of the manifestation that you wish to make."

"You know it very well — you've guessed it," Nick rejoined, looking before him in a conscious modest way which, if he had been a few years younger, would have been called sheepish.

"Ah, you've broken the scent with telling me you are going to return to the House of Commons," said Nash.

"No wonder you don't make it out! My situation is certainly absurd enough. What I really want to do is to be a painter. That's the abject, crude, ridiculous fact. In this out-of-the-way corner, at the dead of night, in lowered tones, I

venture to disclose it to you. Isn't that the æsthetic life?"

"Do you know how to paint?" asked Nash.

"Not in the least. No element of burlesque is therefore wanting to my position."

"That makes no difference. I'm so glad!"

"So glad I don't know how?"

"So glad of it all. Yes, that only makes it better. You're a delightful case, and I like delightful cases. We must see it through. I rejoice that I met you."

"Do you think I can do anything?" Nick inquired.

"Paint good pictures? How can I tell, till I've seen some of your work? Does n't it come back to me that at Oxford you used to sketch very prettily? But that's the last thing that matters."

"What does matter, then?" Nick demanded, turning his eyes on his companion.

"To be on the right side — on the side of beauty."

"There will be precious little beauty if I produce nothing but daubs."

"Ah, you cling to the old false measure of success. I must cure you of that. There will be the beauty of having been disinterested and independent; of having taken the world in the free, brave, personal way."

"I shall nevertheless paint decently if I can," Nick declared.

"I'm almost sorry! It will make your case less clear, your example less grand."

"My example will be grand enough, with the fight I shall have to make."

"The fight — with whom?"

"With myself, first of all. I'm awfully against it."

"Ah, but you'll have me on the other side," smiled Nash.

"Well, you'll have more than a handful to meet — everything, every one that belongs to me, that touches me, near or far; my family, my blood, my heredity, my traditions, my promises, my circumstances, my prejudices; my little past, such as it is; my great future, such as it has been supposed it may be."

"I see, I see; it's admirable!" Nash exclaimed. "And Mrs. Dallow into the bargain," he added.

"Yes, Mrs. Dallow, if you like."

"Are you in love with her?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, she is with you — so I perceived."

"Don't say that," said Nick Dormer, with sudden sternness.

"Ah, you are, you are!" his companion rejoined, judging apparently from this accent.

"I don't know what I am — heaven help me!" Nick broke out, tossing his hat down on his little tin table with vehemence. "I'm a freak of nature and a sport of the mocking gods! Why

should they go out of their way to worry me? Why should they do everything so inconsequent, so improbable, so preposterous? It's the vulgar-est practical joke. There has never been anything of the sort among us; we are all Philistines to the core, with about as much æsthetic sense as that hat. It's excellent soil — I don't complain of it — but not a soil to grow that flower. From where the devil, then, has the seed been dropped? I look back from generation to generation; I scour our annals without finding the least little sketching grandmother, any sign of a building, or versifying, or collecting, or even tulip-raising ancestor. They were all as blind as bats, and none the less happy for that. I'm a wanton variation, an unaccountable monster. My dear father, rest his soul, went through life without a suspicion that there is anything in it that can't be boiled into blue-books; and he became, in that conviction, a very distinguished person. He brought me up in the same simplicity, and in the hope of the same eminence. It would have been better if I had remained so. I think it's partly your fault that I have n't," Nick went on. "At Oxford you were very bad company for me, my evil genius; you opened my eyes, you communicated the poison. Since then, little by little, it has been working within me; vaguely, covertly, insensibly at first, but during the last year or two with violence, pertinacity, cruelty. I have taken every antidote in life; but it's no use, —

I'm stricken. It tears me to pieces, as I may say."

"I see, I follow you," said Nash, who had listened to this recital with radiant interest and curiosity. "And that's why you are going to stand."

"Precisely — it's an antidote. And, at present you're another."

"Another?"

"That's why I jumped at you. A bigger dose of you may disagree with me to that extent that I shall either die or get better."

"I shall control the dilution," said Nash. "Poor fellow — if you're elected!" he added.

"Poor fellow, either way. You don't know the atmosphere in which I live; the horror, the scandal that my apostasy would inspire, the injury and suffering that it would inflict. I believe it would kill my mother. She thinks my father is watching me from the skies."

"Jolly to make him jump!" Nash exclaimed.

"He would jump indeed; he would come straight down on top of me. And then the grotesqueness of it — to *begin*, all of a sudden, at my age."

"It's perfect, indeed; it's a magnificent case," Nash went on.

"Think how it sounds — a paragraph in the London papers: 'Mr. Nicholas Dormer, M. P. for Harsh and son of the late Right Honourable, and so forth and so forth, is about to give up his seat

and withdraw from public life, in order to devote himself to the practice of portrait-painting. Orders respectfully solicited.'"

"The nineteenth century is better than I thought," said Nash. "It's the portrait that preoccupies you?"

"I wish you could see; you must come, immediately, to my place in London."

"You wretch, you're capable of having talent!" cried Nash.

"No, I'm too old, too old. It's too late to go through the mill."

"You make *me* young! Don't miss your election, at your peril. Think of the edification."

"The edification?"

"Of your throwing it all up the next moment."

"That would be pleasant for Mr. Carteret," Nick observed.

"Mr. Carteret?"

"A dear old fellow who will wish to pay my agent's bill."

"Serve him right, for such depraved tastes."

"You do me good," said Nick, getting up and turning away.

"Don't call me useless, then."

"Ah, but not in the way you mean. It's only if I don't get in that I shall perhaps console myself with the brush," Nick continued, as they retraced their steps.

"For the sake of all the Muses, then, don't stand. For you *will* get in."

"Very likely. At any rate I've promised."

"You've promised Mrs. Dallow?"

"It's her place; she'll put me in," Nick said.

"Baleful woman! But I'll pull you out!"

X.

FOR several days Peter Sherringham had business in hand which left him neither time nor freedom of mind to occupy himself actively with the ladies of the Hôtel de la Garonne. There were moments when they brushed across his memory, but their passage was rapid and not lighted up with any particular complacency of attention; for he shrank considerably from bringing it to the proof — the question of whether Miriam would be an interest or only a bore. She had left him, after their second meeting, with a quickened expectation, but in the course of a few hours that flame had burned dim. Like many other men, Sherringham was a mixture of impulse and reflection; but he was peculiar in this, that thinking things over almost always made him think less well of them. He found illusions necessary, so that in order to keep an adequate number going he often earnestly forbade himself that exercise. Mrs. Rooth and her daughter were there and could certainly be trusted to make themselves felt. He was conscious of their anxiety, their calculations, as of a kind of oppression, and knew that, whatever results might ensue, he should have to do something positive for them. An idea

of tenacity, of worrying feminine duration, associated itself with their presence; he would have assented, with a silent nod, to the proposition (enunciated by Gabriel Nash) that he was saddled with them. Remedies hovered before him, but they figured also, at the same time, as complications; ranging vaguely from the expenditure of money to the discovery that he was in love. This latter accident would be particularly tedious; he had a full perception of the arts by which the girl's mother might succeed in making it so. It would not be a compensation for trouble, but a trouble which in itself would require compensation. Would that balm spring from the spectacle of the young lady's genius? The genius would have to be very great to justify a rising young diplomatist in making a fool of himself.

With the excuse of pressing work he put off his young pupil from day to day, and from day to day he expected to hear her knock at his door. It would be time enough when they came after him; and he was unable to see how, after all, he could serve them even then. He had proposed, impetuously, a course of theatres; but that would be a considerable personal effort, now that the summer was about to begin, with bad air, stale pieces, tired actors. When, however, more than a week had elapsed without a reminder of his neglected promise, it came over him that he must himself, in honor, give a sign. There was a delicacy in such discretion — he was touched by be-

ing let alone. The flurry of work at the embassy was over, and he had time to ask himself what, in especial, he should do. He wished to have something definite to suggest before communicating with the Hôtel de la Garonne.

As a consequence of this speculation he went back to Madame Carré, to ask her to reconsider her unfavorable judgment and give the young English lady — to oblige him — a dozen lessons of the sort that she knew how to give. He was aware that this request scarcely stood on its feet ; for in the first place Madame Carré never reconsidered, when once she had got her impression, and in the second she never wasted herself on subjects whom nature had not formed to do her honor. He knew that his asking her to strain a point to please him would give her a false idea (for that matter, she had it already) of his relations, actual or prospective, with the girl ; but he reflected that he need n't care for that, as Miriam herself probably would n't care. What he had mainly in mind was to say to the old actress that she had been mistaken — the *jeune Anglaise* was not such a duffer. This would take some courage, but it would also add to the amusement of his visit.

He found her at home, but as soon as he had expressed the conviction I have mentioned she exclaimed, “ Oh, your *jeune Anglaise* ; I know a great deal more about her than you ! She has been back to see me twice ; she does n't go the

longest way round. She charges me like a grenadier, and she asks me to give her — guess a little what! — private recitations, all to herself. If she does n't succeed, it won't be for want of knowing how to thump at doors. The other day, when I came in, she was waiting for me; she had been there for an hour. My private recitations — have you an idea what people pay for them?"

"Between artists, you know, there are easier conditions," Sherringham laughed.

"How do I know if she's an artist? She won't open her mouth to me; what she wants is to make me say things to her. She does make me — I don't know how — and she sits there gaping at me with her big eyes. They look like open pockets!"

"I dare say she'll profit by it," said Sherringham.

"I dare say *you* will! Her face is stupid while she watches me, and when she has tired me out she simply walks away. However, as she comes back —" Madame Carré paused a moment, listened, and then exclaimed, "Did n't I tell you?"

Sherringham heard a parley of voices in the little antechamber, and the next moment the door was pushed open and Miriam Rooth bounded into the room. She was flushed and breathless, without a smile, very direct.

"Will you hear me to-day? I know four things," she immediately began. Then, perceiving Sherringham, she added in the same brisk,

earnest tone, as if the matter were of the highest importance, "Oh, how d'ye do? I'm very glad you are here." She said nothing else to him than this, appealed to him in no way, made no allusion to his having neglected her, but addressed herself entirely to Madame Carré, as if he had not been there; making no excuses and using no flattery; taking rather a tone of equal authority, as if she considered that the celebrated artist had a sacred duty toward her. This was another variation, Sherringham thought; it differed from each of the attitudes in which he had previously seen her. It came over him suddenly that so far from there being any question of her having the histrionic nature, she simply had it in such perfection that she was always acting; that her existence was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next, before the perpetual mirror of some curiosity or admiration or wonder—some spectatorship that she perceived or imagined in the people about her. Interested as he had ever been in the profession of which she was potentially an ornament, this idea startled him by its novelty and even lent, on the spot, a formidable, a really appalling character to Miriam Rooth. It struck him, abruptly, that a woman whose only being was to "make believe," to make believe that she had any and every being that you liked, that would serve a purpose, produce a certain effect, and whose identity resided in the continuity of her personations, so that she

had no moral privacy, as he phrased it to himself, but lived in a high wind of exhibition, of figuration — such a woman was a kind of monster, in whom of necessity there would be nothing to like, because there would be nothing to take hold of. He felt for a moment that he had been very simple not to have achieved before that analysis of the actress. The girl's very face made it vivid to him now — the discovery that she positively had no countenance of her own, but only the countenance of the occasion, a sequence, a variety (capable possibly of becoming immense), of representative movements. She was always trying them, practicing them, for her amusement or profit, jumping from one to the other and extending her range; and this would doubtless be her occupation more and more as she acquired ease and confidence. The expression that came nearest to belonging to her, as it were, was the one that came nearest to being a blank — an air of inanity when she forgot herself, watching something. Then her eye was heavy and her mouth rather common; though it was perhaps just at such a moment that the fine line of her head told most. She had looked slightly *bête* even when Sherringham, on their first meeting at Madame Carré's, said to Nick Dormer that she was the image of the Tragic Muse.

Now, at any rate, he had the apprehension that she might do what she liked with her face. It was an elastic substance, an element of gutta-

percha, like the flexibility of the gymnast, the lady who, at a music-hall, is shot from the mouth of a cannon. He colored a little at this quickened view of the actress ; he had always looked more poetically, somehow, at that priestess of art. But what was she, the priestess, when one came to think of it, but a female gymnast, a mountebank at higher wages ? She did n't literally hang by her heels from a trapeze, holding a fat man in her teeth, but she made the same use of her tongue, of her eyes, of the imitative trick, that her muscular sister made of leg and jaw. It was an odd circumstance that Miriam Rooth's face seemed to him to-day a finer instrument than old Madame Carré's. It was doubtless that the girl's was fresh and strong, with a future in it, while poor Madame Carré's was worn and weary, with only a past.

The old woman said something, half in jest, half in real resentment, about the brutality of youth, as Miriam went to a mirror and quickly took off her hat, patting and arranging her hair, as a preliminary to making herself heard. Sherringham saw, with surprise and amusement, that the clever Frenchwoman, who had in her long life exhausted every adroitness, was in a manner helpless, condemned, both protesting and consenting. Miriam had taken but a few days and a couple of visits to become a successful force ; she had imposed herself, and Madame Carré, while she laughed (yet looked terrible too, with

artifices of eye and gesture), was reduced to the last line of defense — that of declaring her coarse and clumsy, saying she might knock her down, but that proved nothing. She spoke jestingly enough not to offend Miriam, but her manner betrayed the irritation of an intelligent woman who, at an advanced age, found herself for the first time failing to understand. What she did n't understand was the kind of social product that had been presented to her by Gabriel Nash; and this suggested to Sherringham that the *jeune Anglaise* was perhaps indeed rare, a new type, as Madame Carré must have seen innumerable varieties. He guessed that the girl was perfectly prepared to be abused and that her indifference to what might be thought of her discretion was a proof of life, health, and spirit, the insolence of conscious power.

When she had given herself a touch at the glass she turned round, with a rapid "*Ecoutez maintenant!*" and stood leaning a moment, slightly lowered and inclined backward, with her hands behind her and supporting her, on the table in front of the mirror. She waited an instant, turning her eyes from one of her companions to the other, as if she were taking possession of them (an eminently conscious, intentional proceeding, which made Sherringham ask himself what had become of her former terror and whether that and her tears had all been a comedy): after which, abruptly straightening

herself, she began to repeat a short French poem, a composition modern and delicate, one of the things she had induced Madame Carré to say over to her. She had learned it, practiced it, rehearsed it to her mother, and now she had been childishly eager to show what she could do with it. What she mainly did was to reproduce with a crude fidelity, but with extraordinary memory, the intonations, the personal quavers and cadences of her model.

"How bad you make me seem to myself, and if I were you how much better I should say it!" was Madame Carré's first criticism.

Miriam allowed her little time to develop this idea, for she broke out, at the shortest intervals, with the five other specimens of verse to which the old actress had handed her the key. They were all delicate lyrics, of tender or pathetic intention, by contemporary poets — all things demanding perfect taste and art, a mastery of tone, of insinuation, in the interpreter. Miriam had gobbled them up, and she gave them forth in the same way as the first, with close, rude, audacious mimicry. There was a moment when Sherringham was afraid Madame Carré would think she was making fun of her manner, her celebrated simpers and grimaces, so extravagant did the girl's performance cause these refinements to appear.

When she had finished, the old woman said, "Should you like now to hear how *you* do it?" and, without waiting for an answer, phrased and

trilled the last of the pieces, from beginning to end, exactly as Miriam had done, making this imitation of an imitation the drollest thing conceivable. If she had been annoyed it was a perfect revenge. Miriam had dropped on a sofa, exhausted, and she stared at first, looking flushed and wild; then she gave way to merriment, laughing with a high sense of comedy. She said afterwards, to defend herself, that the verses in question, and indeed all those she had recited, were of the most difficult sort: you had to do them; they did n't do themselves—they were things in which the *gros moyens* were of no avail. "Ah, my poor child, your means are all *gros moyens*; you appear to have no others," Madame Carré replied. "You do what you can, but there are people like that; it's the way they are made. They can never come nearer to the delicate; shades don't exist for them, they don't see certain differences. It was to show you a difference that I repeated that thing as you repeat it, as you represent my doing it. If you are struck with the little the two ways have in common, so much the better. But you seem to me to coarsen everything you touch."

Sherringham thought this judgment harsh to cruelty, and perceived that Miss Rooth had the power to set the teeth of her instructress on edge. She acted on her nerves; she was made of a thick, rough substance which the old woman was not accustomed to manipulate. This exas-

peration, however, was a kind of flattery ; it was neither indifference nor simple contempt ; it acknowledged a mystifying reality in the girl and even a degree of importance. Miriam remarked, serenely enough, that the things she wanted most to do were just those that were not for the *gros moyens*, the vulgar obvious dodges, the starts and shouts, that any one could think of and that the *gros public* liked. She wanted to do what was most difficult and to plunge into it from the first ; and she explained, as if it were a discovery of her own, that there were two kinds of scenes and speeches : those which acted themselves, of which the treatment was plain, the only way, so that you had just to take it ; and those which were open to interpretation, with which you had to fight every step, rendering, arranging, doing it according to your idea. Some of the most effective things, and the most celebrated and admired, like the frenzy of Juliet with her potion, were of the former sort ; but it was the others she liked best.

Madame Carré received this revelation good-naturedly enough, considering its want of freshness, and only laughed at the young lady for looking so nobly patronizing while she gave it. It was clear that her laughter was partly dedicated to the good faith with which Miriam described herself as preponderantly interested in the subtler problems of her art. Sherringham was charmed with the girl's pluck—if it was

pluck and not mere density — the brightness with which she submitted, for a purpose, to the old woman's rough usage. He wanted to take her away, to give her a friendly caution, to advise her not to become a bore, not to expose herself. But she held up her beautiful head in a way that showed she didn't care at present how she exposed herself, and that (it was half coarseness — Madame Carré was so far right — and half fortitude) she had no intention of coming away so long as there was anything to be picked up. She sat, and still she sat, challenging her hostess with every sort of question — some reasonable, some ingenious, some strangely futile and some highly indiscreet; but all with the effect that, contrary to Sherringham's expectation, Madame Carré warmed to the work of answering and explaining, became interested, was content to keep her and to talk. Yet she took her ease; she relieved herself, with the rare cynicism of the artist, all the crudity, the irony and intensity of a discussion of esoteric things, of personal mysteries, of methods and secrets. It was the oddest hour Sherringham had ever spent, even in the course of investigation which had often led him into the *cuisine*, as the French called it, the distillery or back-shop, of the admired profession. He got up several times to come away; then he remained, partly in order not to leave Miriam alone with her terrible initiatress, partly because he was both amused and edified, and partly because

Madame Carré held him by the appeal of her sharp, confidential old eyes, addressing her talk to him, with Miriam as a subject, a vile illustration. She undressed this young lady, as it were, from head to foot, turned her inside out, weighed and measured and sounded her: it was all, for Sherringham, a new revelation of the point to which, in her profession and nation, a ferocious analysis had been carried, with an intelligence of the business and a special vocabulary. What struck him, above all, was the way she knew her reasons and everything was sharp and clear in her mind and lay under her hand. If she had rare perceptions she had traced them to their source; she could give an account of what she did; she knew perfectly why; she could explain it, defend it, amplify it, fight for it: and all this was an intellectual joy to her, allowing her a chance to abound and insist and be clever. There was a kind of cruelty, or at least of hardness in it all, to Sherringham's English sense, that sense which can never really reconcile itself to the question of execution and has extraneous sentiments to placate with compromises and superficialities, frivolities that have often a pleasant moral fragrance. In theory there was nothing that he valued more than just such a logical passion as Madame Carré's; but in fact, when he found himself in close quarters with it, it was apt to seem to him an ado about nothing.

If the old woman was hard it was not that

many of her present conclusions, as regards Miriam, were not indulgent, but that she had a vision of the great manner, of right and wrong, of the just and the false, so high and religious that the individual was nothing before it — a prompt and easy sacrifice. It made Sherringham uncomfortable, as he had been made uncomfortable by certain *feuilletons*, reviews of the theatres in the Paris newspapers, which he was committed to thinking important, but of which, when they were very good, he was rather ashamed. When they were very good, that is when they were very thorough, they were very personal, as was inevitable in dealing with the most personal of the arts: they went into details; they put the dots on the *i*'s; they discussed, impartially, the qualities of appearance, the physical gifts of the actor or actress, finding them in some cases reprehensibly inadequate. Sherringham could not rid himself of a prejudice against these pronouncements; in the case of the actresses especially they appeared to him brutal and indelicate — unmanly as coming from a critic sitting smoking in his chair. At the same time he was aware of the dilemma (he hated it; it made him blush still more) in which his objection lodged him. If one was right in liking the actor's art, one ought to have been interested in every candid criticism of it, which, given the peculiar conditions, would be legitimate in proportion as it should be minute. If the criticism that recognized frankly these conditions seemed

an inferior or an offensive thing, then what was to be said for the art itself? What an implication, if the criticism was tolerable only so long as it was worthless — so long as it remained vague and timid! This was a knot which Sherringham had never straightened out: he contented himself with saying that there was no reason a theatrical critic should n't be a gentleman, at the same time that he often remarked that it was an odious trade, which no gentleman could possibly follow. The best of the fraternity, so conspicuous in Paris, were those who did n't follow it — those who, while pretending to write about the stage, wrote about everything else.

It was as if Madame Carré, in pursuance of her inflamed sense that the art was everything and the individual nothing, save as he happened to serve it, had said, "Well, if she *will* have it she shall; she shall know what she is in for, what I went through, battered and broken in as we all have been — all who are worthy, who have had the honor. She shall know the real point of view." It was as if she were still haunted with Mrs. Rooth's nonsense, her hypocrisy, her scruples — something she felt a need to belabor, to trample on. Miriam took it all as a bath, a baptism, with passive exhilaration and gleeful shivers; staring, wondering, sometimes blushing and failing to follow, but not shrinking nor wounded; laughing, when it was necessary, at her own expense and feeling evidently that this at last was

the air of the profession, an initiation which nothing could undo. Sherringham said to her that he would see her home — that he wanted to talk to her and she must walk away with him. “And it’s understood, then, she may come back,” he added to Madame Carré. “It’s my affair, of course. You’ll take an interest in her for a month or two ; she will sit at your feet.”

“Oh, I’ll knock her about ; she seems stout enough !” said the old actress.

XI.

WHEN she had descended into the street with Sherringham, Miriam informed him that she was thirsty, dying to drink something : upon which he asked her if she would have any objection to going with him to a café.

“Objection? I have spent my life in cafés!” she exclaimed. “They are warm in winter, and they are full of gaslight. Mamma and I have sat in them for hours, many a time, with a *consommation* of three sous, to save fire and candles at home. We have lived in places we could n’t sit in, if you want to know — where there was only really room if we were in bed. Mamma’s money is sent out from England, and sometimes it did n’t come. Once it did n’t come for months — for months and months. I don’t know how we lived. There was n’t any to come; there was n’t any to get home. That is n’t amusing when you’re away, in a foreign town, without any friends. Mamma used to borrow, but people would n’t always lend. You need n’t be afraid — she won’t borrow from you. We are rather better now. Something has been done in England; I don’t understand what. It’s only fivepence a year, but it has been settled; it comes regularly; it used to

come only when we had written and begged and waited. But it made no difference ; mamma was always up to her ears in books. They served her for food and drink. When she had nothing to eat she began a novel in ten volumes — the old-fashioned ones ; they lasted longest. She knows every *cabinet de lecture* in every town ; the little cheap, shabby ones, I mean, in the back streets, where they have odd volumes and only ask a sou, and the books are so old that they smell bad. She takes them to the cafés — the little cheap, shabby cafés, too — and she reads there all the evening. That's very well for her, but it doesn't feed me. I don't like a diet of dirty old novels. I sit there beside her, with nothing to do, not even a stocking to mend ; she doesn't think that's *comme il faut*. I don't know what the people take me for. However, we have never been spoken to : any one can see mamma's a lady. As for me, I dare say I might be anything. If you're going to be an actress you must get used to being looked at. There were people in England who used to ask us to stay ; some of them were our cousins — or mamma says they were. I have never been very clear about our cousins, and I don't think they were at all clear about us. Some of them are 'dead ; the others don't ask us any more. You should hear mamma on the subject of our visits in England. It's very convenient when your cousins are dead, because that explains everything. Mamma has

delightful phrases : 'My family is almost extinct.' Then your family may have been anything you like. Ours, of course, was magnificent. We did stay in a place once where there was a deer-park, and also private theatricals. I played in them ; I was only fifteen years old, but I was very big and I thought I was in heaven. I will go anywhere you like ; you need n't be afraid, we have been in places ! I have learned a great deal that way ; sitting beside mamma and watching people, their faces, their types, their movements. There's a great deal goes on in cafés : people come to them to talk things over, their private affairs, their complications ; they have important meetings. Oh, I've observed scenes, between men and women — very quiet, terribly quiet, but tragic ! Once I saw a woman do something that I'm going to do some day, when I'm great — if I can get the situation. I'll tell you what it is some day ; I'll do it for you. Oh, it *is* the book of life !"

So Miriam discoursed, familiarly, disconnectedly, as the pair went their way down the Rue de Constantinople ; and she continued to abound in anecdote and remark after they were seated, face to face, at a little marble table in an establishment which Sherringham selected carefully and he had caused her, at her request, to be accommodated with *sirup d'orgeat*. "I know what it will come to : Madame Carré will want to keep me." This was one of the announcements she presently made.

“To keep you?”

“For the French stage. She won’t want to let you have me.” She said things of that kind, astounding in self-complacency, the assumption of quick success. She was in earnest, evidently prepared to work, but her imagination flew over preliminaries and probations, took no account of the steps in the process, especially the first tiresome ones, the test of patience. Sherringham had done nothing for her as yet, given no substantial pledge of interest; yet she was already talking as if his protection were assured and jealous. Certainly, however, she seemed to belong to him very much indeed, as she sat facing him in the Paris café, in her youth, her beauty and her talkative confidence. This degree of possession was highly agreeable to him, and he asked nothing more than to make it last and go further. The impulse to draw her out was irresistible, to encourage her to show herself to the end; for if he was really destined to take her career in hand he counted on some pleasant equivalent — such, for instance, as that she should at least amuse him.

“It’s very singular; I know nothing like it,” he said — “your equal mastery of two languages.”

“Say of half a dozen,” Miriam smiled.

“Oh, I don’t believe in the others, to the same degree. I don’t imagine that, with all deference to your undeniable facility, you would be judged

fit to address a German or an Italian audience in their own tongue. But you might a French, perfectly, and they are the most particular of all; for their idiom is supersensitive, and they are incapable of enduring the *baragouinage* of foreigners, to which we listen with such complacency. In fact, your French is better than your English — it's more conventional; there are little queernesses and impurities in your English, as if you had lived abroad too much. Ah, you must work that."

"I'll work it with you. I like the way you speak."

"You must speak beautifully; you must do something for the standard."

"For the standard?"

"There is n't any, after all; it has gone to the dogs."

"Oh, I'll bring it back. I know what you mean."

"No one knows, no one cares; the sense is gone — it is n't in the public," Sherringham continued, ventilating a grievance he was rarely able to forget, the vision of which now suddenly made a mission, full of sanctity, for Miriam Rooth. "Purity of speech, on our stage, does n't exist. Every one speaks as he likes, and audiences never notice; it's the last thing they think of. The place is given up to abominable dialects and individual tricks, any vulgarity flourishes, and on top of it all the Americans, with every conceiv-

able crudity, come in to make confusion worse confounded. And when one laments it people stare ; they don't know what one means."

"Do you mean the grand manner, certain pompous pronunciations, the style of the Kembles?"

"I mean any style that *is* a style, that is a system, an art, that contributes a positive beauty to utterance. When I pay ten shillings to hear you speak, I want you to know how, *que diable!* Say that to people and they are mostly lost in stupor ; only a few, the very intelligent ones, exclaim : 'Then do you want actors to be affected?'"

"And *do* you?" asked Miriam, full of interest.

"My poor child, what else, under the sun, should they be? Isn't their whole art the affectation *par excellence?* The public won't stand that to-day, so one hears it said. If that be true, it simply means that the theatre, as I care for it, that is as a personal art, is at an end."

"Never, never, never!" the girl cried, in a voice that made a dozen people look round.

"I sometimes think it — that the personal art *is* at an end, and that henceforth we shall have only the arts — capable, no doubt, of immense development in their way (indeed they have already reached it) — of the stage-carpenter and the costumer. In London the drama is already smothered in scenery ; the interpretation scrambles off as it can. To get the old personal impression, which used to be everything, you must go to the poor countries, and most of all to Italy."

"Oh, I've had it; it's very personal!" said Miriam, knowingly.

"You've seen the nudity of the stage, the poor painted, tattered screen behind, and in the empty space the histrionic figure, doing everything it knows how, in complete possession. The personality is n't our English personality, and it may not always carry us with it; but the direction is right, and it has the superiority that it's a human exhibition, not a mechanical one."

"I can act just like an Italian," said Miriam, eagerly.

"I would rather you acted like an Englishwoman, if an Englishwoman would only act."

"Oh, I'll show you!"

"But you're not English," said Sherringham, sociably, with his arms on the table.

"I beg your pardon; you should hear mamma about our 'race.'"

"You're a Jewess — I'm sure of that," Sherringham went on.

She jumped at this, as he was destined to see, later, that she would jump at anything that would make her more interesting or striking; even at things which, grotesquely, contradicted or excluded each other. "That's always possible, if one's clever. I'm very willing, because I want to be the English Rachel."

"Then you must leave Madame Carré, as soon as you have got from her what she can give."

"Oh, you need n't fear; you sha'n't lose me,"

the girl replied, with gross, charming fatuity. "My name is Jewish," she went on, "but it was that of my grandmother, my father's mother. She was a baroness, in Germany. That is, she was the daughter of a baron."

Sherringham accepted this statement with reservations, but he replied, "Put all that together, and it makes you very sufficiently of Rachel's tribe."

"I don't care, if I'm of her tribe artistically. I'm of the family of the artists; *je me fiche* of any other! I'm in the same style as that woman; I know it."

"You speak as if you had seen her," said Sherringham, amused at the way she talked of "that woman."

"Oh, I know all about her; I know all about all the great actors. But that won't prevent me from speaking divine English."

"You must learn lots of verse; you must repeat it to me," Sherringham went on. "You must break yourself in till you can say anything. You must learn passages of Milton, passages of Wordsworth."

"Did *they* write plays?"

"Oh, it is n't only a matter of plays! You can't speak a part properly till you can speak everything else, anything that comes up, especially in proportion as it's difficult. That gives you authority."

"Oh, yes, I'm going in for authority. There's

more chance in English," the girl added, in the next breath. "There are not so many others — the terrible competition. There are so many here — not that I'm afraid," she chattered on. "But we've got America, and they haven't. America's a great place."

"You talk like a theatrical agent. They're lucky not to have it as we have it. Some of them do go, and it ruins them."

"Why, it fills their pockets!" Miriam cried.

"Yes, but see what they pay. It's the death of an actor to play to big populations that don't understand his language. It's nothing then but the *gros moyens*; all his delicacy perishes. However, they'll understand *you*."

"Perhaps I shall be too affected," said Miriam.

"You won't be more so than Garrick, or Mrs. Siddons, or John Kemble, or Edmund Kean. They understood Edmund Kean. All reflection is affectation, and all acting is reflection."

"I don't know; mine is instinct," Miriam replied.

"My dear young lady, you talk of 'yours;' but don't be offended if I tell you that yours does n't exist. Some day it will, if it comes off. Madame Carré's does, because she has reflected. The talent, the desire, the energy are an instinct; but by the time these things become a performance they are an instinct put in its place."

"Madame Carré is very philosophic. I shall never be like her."

"Of course you won't ; you 'll be original. But you 'll have your own ideas."

"I dare say I shall have a good many of yours," said Miriam, smiling across the table.

They sat a moment, looking at each other.

"Don't go in for coquetry ; it's a waste of time."

"Well, that's civil !" the girl cried.

"Oh, I don't mean for me ; I mean for yourself. I want you to be so concentrated. I am bound to give you good advice. You don't strike me as flirtatious and that sort of thing, and that's in your favor."

"In my favor ?"

"It does save time."

"Perhaps it saves too much. Don't you think the artist ought to have passions ?"

Sherringham hesitated a moment ; he thought an examination of this question premature. "Flirtations are not passions," he replied. "No, you are simple — at least I suspect you are ; for of course, with a woman, one would be clever to know."

She asked why he pronounced her simple, but he judged it best, and more consonant with fair play, to defer even a treatment of this branch of the question ; so that, to change the subject, he said : "Be sure you don't betray me to your friend Mr. Nash."

"Betray you ? Do you mean about your recommending affectation ?"

"Dear me, no; he recommends it himself. That is, he practices it, and on a scale!"

"But he makes one hate it."

"He proves what I mean," said Sherringham: "that the great comedian is the one who raises it to a science. If we paid ten shillings to listen to Mr. Nash we should think him very fine. But we want to know what it's supposed to be."

"It's too odious, the way he talks about *us*!" Miriam cried, assentingly.

"About 'us'?"

"Us poor actors."

"It's the competition he dislikes," said Sherringham, laughing.

"However, he's very good-natured; he lent mamma thirty pounds," the girl added, honestly. Sherringham, at this information, was not able to repress a certain small twinge which his companion perceived and of which she appeared to mistake the meaning. "Of course he'll get it back," she went on, while Sherringham looked at her in silence for a minute. Fortune had not supplied him profusely with money, but his emotion was not caused by the apprehension that he too would probably have to put his hand in his pocket for Mrs. Rooth. It was simply the instinctive recoil of a fastidious nature from the idea of familiar intimacy with people who lived from hand to mouth, and a sense that that intimacy would have to be defined if it was to go much further. He would wish to know what it was supposed to be,

like Gabriel Nash's histrionics. After a moment Miriam mistook his thought still more completely, and in doing so gave him a flash of fore-knowledge of the way it was in her to strike from time to time a note exasperatingly, almost consciously vulgar, which one would hate for the reason, among others, that by that time one would be in love with her. "Well, then, he won't — if you don't believe it!" she exclaimed, with a laugh. He was saying to himself that the only possible form was that they should borrow only from him. "You're a funny man. I make you blush," Miriam persisted.

"I must reply with the *tu quoque*, though I have not that effect on you."

"I don't understand," said the girl.

"You're an extraordinary young lady."

"You mean I'm horrid. Well, I dare say I am. But I'm better when you know me."

Sherringham made no direct rejoinder to this, but after a moment he said, "Your mother must repay that money. I'll give it to her."

"You had better give it to him!" cried Miriam. "If once *we* have it" — She interrupted herself, and with another and a softer tone, one of her professional transitions, she remarked, "I suppose you have never known any one that's poor."

"I'm poor myself. That is, I'm very far from rich. But why receive favors —?" And here he in turn checked himself, with the sense that he

was indeed taking a great deal on his back if he pretended already (he had not seen the pair three times) to regulate their intercourse with the rest of the world. But Miriam instantly carried out his thought and more than his thought.

"Favors from Mr. Nash? Oh, he does n't count!"

The way she dropped these words (they would have been admirable on the stage) made him laugh and say immediately: "What I meant just now was that you are not to tell him, after all my swagger, that I consider that you and I are really required to save our theatre."

"Oh, if we can save it, he shall know it!" Then Miriam added that she must positively get home; her mother would be in a state: she had really scarcely ever been out alone. He might n't think it, but so it was. Her mother's ideas, those awfully proper ones, were not all talk. She *did* keep her! Sherringham accepted this — he had an adequate, and indeed an analytic vision of Mrs. Rooth's conservatism; but he observed at the same time that his companion made no motion to rise. He made none, either; he only said —

"We are very frivolous, the way we chatter. What you want to do, to get your foot in the stirrup, is supremely difficult. There is everything to overcome. You have neither an engagement nor the prospect of an engagement."

"Oh, you'll get me one!" Miriam's manner expressed that this was so certain that it was not

worth dilating upon ; so, instead of dilating, she inquired abruptly, a second time, " Why do you think I'm so simple ? "

" I don't, then. Did n't I tell you just now that you were extraordinary ? That's the term, moreover, that you applied to yourself, when you came to see me — when you said a girl had to be, to wish to go on the stage. It remains the right one, and your simplicity does n't mitigate it. What's rare in you is that you have — as I suspect, at least — no nature of your own." Miriam listened to this as if she were preparing to argue with it or not, only as it should strike her as being a pleasing picture ; but as yet, naturally, she failed to understand. " You are always playing something ; there are no intervals. It's the absence of intervals, of a *fond* or background, that I don't comprehend. You're an embroidery without a canvas."

" Yes, perhaps," the girl replied, with her head on one side, as if she were looking at the pattern. " But I'm very honest."

" You can't be everything, a consummate actress and a flower of the field. You've got to choose."

She looked at him a moment. " I'm glad you think I'm so wonderful."

" Your feigning may be honest, in the sense that your only feeling *is* your feigned one," Sheringham went on. " That's what I mean by the absence of a ground or of intervals. It's a kind of thing that's a labyrinth ! "

"I know what I am," said Miriam, sententially.

But her companion continued, following his own train: "Were you really so frightened, the first day you went to Madame Carré's?"

She stared a moment, and then, with a flush, throwing back her head, "Do you think I was pretending?"

"I think you always are. However, your vanity (if you had any!) would be natural."

"I have plenty of that — I'm not ashamed to own it."

"You would be capable of pretending that you have. But excuse the audacity and the crudity of my speculations — it only proves my interest. What is it that you know you are?"

"Why, an artist. Is n't that a canvas?"

"Yes, an intellectual one, but not a moral."

"Oh yes, it is, too. And I'm a good girl: won't that do?"

"It remains to be seen," Sherringham laughed.

"A creature who is *all* an artist — I am curious to see that."

"Surely it has been seen, in lots of painters, lots of musicians."

"Yes, but those arts are not personal, like yours. I mean not so much so. There's something left for — what shall I call it? — for character."

Miriam stared again, with her tragic light.

"And do you think I've got no character?" As

he hesitated she pushed back her chair, rising rapidly.

He looked up at her an instant — she seemed so “plastic ;” and then, rising too, he answered :
“Delightful being, you’ve got a hundred !”

XII.

THE summer arrived and the dense air of the Paris theatres became in fact a still more complicated mixture ; yet the occasions were not few on which Peter Sherringham, having placed a box, near the stage (most often a stuffy, dusky *baig-noire*), at the disposal of Mrs. Rooth and her daughter, found time to look in, as he said, to spend a part of the evening with them and point the moral of the performance. The pieces, the successes of the winter, had entered the automatic phase : they went on by the force of the impetus acquired, deriving little fresh life from the interpretation, and in ordinary conditions their strong points, as rendered by the actors, would have been as wearisome to Sherringham as an unfortunate repetition of a good story. But it was not long before he became aware that the conditions could not be regarded as ordinary. There was a new infusion in his consciousness — an element in his life which altered the relations of things. He was not easy till he had found the right name for it — a name the more satisfactory that it was simple, comprehensive, and plausible. A new “distraction,” in the French sense, was what he flattered himself he had discovered ; he

could recognize that as freely as possible without being obliged to classify the agreeable resource as a new entanglement. He was neither too much nor too little diverted ; he had all his usual attention to give to his work : he had only an employment for his odd hours, which, without being imperative, had, over various others, the advantage of a certain continuity.

And yet, I hasten to add, he was not so well pleased with it but that, among his friends, he maintained for the present a considerable reserve in regard to it. He had no irresistible impulse to tell people that he had disinterred a strange, handsome girl whom he was bringing up for the theatre. She had been seen by several of his associates, at his rooms ; but she was not soon to be seen there again. Sherringham's reserve might by the ill-natured have been termed dissimulation, inasmuch as when asked by the ladies of the Embassy what had become of the young person who amused them, that day, so cleverly, he gave it out that her whereabouts was uncertain and her destiny probably obscure ; he let it be supposed, in a word, that his benevolence had scarcely survived an accidental, charitable occasion. As he went about his customary business, and perhaps even put a little more conscience into the transaction of it, there was nothing to suggest to his companions that he was engaged in a private speculation of a singular kind. It was perhaps his weakness that he carried the ap-

prehension of ridicule too far ; but his excuse may be said to be that he held it unpardonable for a man publicly enrolled in the service of his country to be ridiculous. It was of course not out of all order that such functionaries, their private situation permitting, should enjoy a personal acquaintance with stars of the dramatic, the lyric, or even the choregraphic stage : high diplomatists had indeed not rarely, and not invisibly, cultivated this privilege without its proving the sepulchre of their reputation. That a gentleman who was not a fool should consent a little to become one for the sake of a celebrated actress or singer — *cela s'était vu*, though it was not perhaps to be recommended. It was not a tendency that was encouraged at headquarters, where even the most rising young men were not encouraged to believe they could never fall. Still, it might pass, if it were kept in its place ; and there were ancient worthies yet in the profession (not those, however, whom the tradition had helped to go furthest) who held that something of the sort was a graceful ornament of the diplomatic character. Sherringham was aware he was very "rising" ; but Miriam Rooth was not yet a celebrated actress. She was only a youthful artist, in conscientious process of formation, encumbered with a mother still more conscientious than herself. She was a young English lady, very earnest about artistic, about remunerative problems. He had accepted the position of a formative influ-

ence ; and that was precisely what might provoke derision. He was a ministering angel — his patience and good-nature really entitled him to the epithet, and his rewards would doubtless some day define themselves ; but meanwhile other promotions were in contingent prospect, for the failure of which these would not, even in their abundance, be a compensation. He kept an unembarrassed eye upon Downing Street ; and while it may frankly be said for him that he was neither a pedant nor a prig, he remembered that the last impression he ought to wish to produce there was that of volatility.

He felt not particularly volatile, however, when he sat behind Miriam at the play and looked over her shoulder at the stage ; her observation being so keen and her comments so unexpected in their vivacity that his curiosity was refreshed and his attention stretched beyond its wont. If the spectacle before the footlights had now lost much of its annual brilliancy, the fashion in which Miriam followed it came near being spectacle enough. Moreover, in most cases the attendance of the little party was at the Théâtre Français ; and it has been sufficiently indicated that Sherringham, though the child of a skeptical age and the votary of a cynical science, was still candid enough to take the serious, the religious view of that establishment — the view of M. Sarcey and of the unregenerate provincial mind. “In the trade that I follow we see things too much in the hard light

of reason, of calculation," he once remarked to his young *protégée*; "but it's good for the mind to keep up a superstition or two; it leaves a margin, like having a second horse to your brougham, for night-work. The arts, the amusements, the æsthetic part of life, are night-work, if I may say so without suggesting the nefarious. At any rate, you want your second horse — your superstition that stays at home when the sun is high — to go your rounds with. The Théâtre Français is my second horse."

Miriam's appetite for this pleasure showed him vividly enough how rarely, in the past, it had been within her reach; and she pleased him, at first, by liking everything, seeing almost no differences and taking her deep draught undiluted. She leaned on the edge of the box with bright voracity; tasting to the core, yet relishing the surface, watching each movement of each actor, attending to the way each thing was said or done as if it were the most important thing, and emitting from time to time applausive or restrictive sounds. It was a very pretty exhibition of enthusiasm, if enthusiasm be ever critical. Sheringham had his wonder about it, as it was a part of the attraction exerted by this young lady that she caused him to have his wonder about everything she did. Was it in fact an exhibition, a line taken for effect, so that, at the comedy, her own comedy was the most successful of all? That question danced attendance on the liberal inter-

course of these young people, and fortunately, as yet, did little to embitter Sherringham's share of it. His general sense that she was personating had its especial moments of suspense and perplexity, and added variety and even occasionally a degree of excitement to their conversation. At the theatre, for the most part, she was really flushed with eagerness; and with the spectators who turned an admiring eye into the dim compartment of which she pervaded the front, she might have passed for a romantic, or at any rate an insatiable young woman from the country.

Mrs. Rooth took a more placid view, but attended immensely to the story, in respect to which she manifested a patient good faith which had its surprises and its comicalities for Sherringham. She found no play too tedious, no *entr'acte* too long, no *baignoire* too hot, no tissue of incidents too complicated, no situation too unnatural and no sentiments too sublime. She gave Sherringham the measure of her power to sit and sit — an accomplishment to which she owed, in the struggle for existence, such superiority as she might be said to have achieved. She could outsit every one, everything else; looking as if she had acquired the practice in repeated years of small frugality combined with large leisure — periods when she had nothing but time to spend and had learned to calculate, in any situation, how long she could stay. "Staying" was so often a saving — a saving of candles, of fire, and

even (for it sometimes implied a vision of light refreshment) of food. Sherringham perceived soon enough that she was complete, in her way, and if he had been addicted to studying the human mixture in its different combinations he would have found in her an interesting compendium of some of the infatuations that survive a hard discipline. He made, indeed, without difficulty, the reflection that her life might have taught her the reality of things, at the same time that he could scarcely help thinking it clever of her to have so persistently declined the lesson. She appeared to have put it by with a deprecating, ladylike smile — a plea of being too soft and bland for experience.

She took the refined, sentimental, tender view of the universe, beginning with her own history and feelings. She believed in everything high and pure, disinterested and orthodox, and even at the Hôtel de la Garonne was unconscious of the shabby or the ugly side of the world. She never despaired : otherwise what would have been the use of being a Neville-Nugent? Only not to have been one — that would have been discouraging. She delighted in novels, poems, perversions, misrepresentations, and evasions, and had a capacity for smooth, superfluous falsification which made Sherringham think her sometimes an amusing and sometimes a tedious inventor. But she was not dangerous, even if you believed her ; she was not even a warning if you did n't.

It was harsh to call her a hypocrite, because you never could have resolved her back into her character: there was no reverse to her blazonry. She built in the air, and was not less amiable than she pretended: only that was a pretension too. She moved altogether in a world of genteel fable and fancy, and Sherringham had to live in it with her, for Miriam's sake, in sociable, vulgar assent, in spite of his feeling that it was rather a low neighborhood. He was at a loss how to take what she said — she talked, sweetly and discursively, of so many things — until he simply perceived that he could only take it, always, for untrue. When Miriam laughed at her he was rather disagreeably affected: “dear mamma's fine stories” was a sufficiently cynical reference to the immemorial infirmity of a parent. But when the girl backed her up, as he phrased it to himself, he liked that even less.

Mrs. Rooth was very fond of a moral, and had never lost her taste for edification. She delighted in a beautiful character, and was gratified to find so many represented in the contemporary French drama. She never failed to direct Miriam's attention to them and to remind her that there is nothing in life so precious as the ideal. Sherringham noted the difference between the mother and the daughter and thought it singularly marked — the way that one took everything for the sense, or behaved as if she did, caring above all for the subject and the romance, the triumph or defeat of

virtue and the moral comfort of it all, and that the other was especially hungry for the manner and the art of it, the presentation and the vividness. Mrs. Rooth abounded in impressive evocations, and yet he saw no link between her facile genius and that of which Miriam gave symptoms. The poor lady never could have been accused of successful deceit, whereas success in this line was exactly what her clever child went in for. She made even the true seem fictive, while Miriam's effort was to make the fictive true. Sherringham thought it an odd, unpromising stock (that of the Neville-Nugents) for a dramatic talent to have sprung from, till he reflected that the evolution was after all natural: the figurative impulse in the mother had become conscious, and therefore higher, through finding an aim, which was beauty, in the daughter. Likely enough the Hebraic Mr. Rooth, with his love of old pots and Christian altar-cloths, had supplied, in the girl's composition, the æsthetic element, the sense of form. In their visits to the theatre there was nothing that Mrs. Rooth more insisted upon than the unprofitableness of deceit, as shown by the most distinguished authors — the folly and degradation, the corrosive effect upon the spirit, of tortuous ways. Sherringham very soon gave up the futile task of piecing together her incongruous references to her early life and her family in England. He renounced even the doctrine that there was a residuum of truth in her claim

of great relationships, for, existent or not, he cared equally little for her ramifications. The principle of this indifference was at bottom a certain desire to disconnect Miriam; for it was disagreeable not to be independent in dealing with her, and he could be fully so only if *she* were.

The early weeks of that summer (they went on, indeed, into August) were destined to establish themselves in his memory as a season of pleasant things. The ambassador went away, and Sherringham had to wait for his own holiday, which he did, during the hot days, contentedly enough, in spacious halls, with a dim, bird-haunted garden. The official world and most other worlds withdrew from Paris, and the Place de la Concorde, a larger, whiter desert than ever, became by a reversal of custom, explorable with safety. The Champs Elysées were dusty and rural, with little creaking booths and exhibitions which made a noise like grasshoppers; the Arc de Triomphe threw its cool, sharp shadow for a mile; the Palais de l'Industrie glittered in the light of the long days; the cabmen, in their red waistcoats, dozed in their boxes; and Sherringham permitted himself a "pot" hat and rarely met a friend. Thus was Miriam still more disconnected, and thus was it possible to deal with her still more independently. The theatres on the boulevard closed, for the most part, but the great temple of the Rue de Richelieu, with an æsthetic responsi-

bility, continued imperturbably to dispense examples of style. Madame Carré was going to Vichy, but she had not yet taken flight, which was a great advantage for Miriam, who could now solicit her attention with the consciousness that she had no engagements *en ville*.

"I make her listen to me — I make her tell me," said the ardent girl, who was always climbing the slope of the Rue de Constantinople, on the shady side, where in the July mornings there was a smell of violets from the moist flower-stands of fat, white-capped *bouquetières*, in the angles of doorways. Miriam liked the Paris of the summer mornings, the clever freshness of all the little trades and the open-air life, the cries, the talk from door to door, which reminded her of the south, where, in the multiplicity of her habitations, she had lived ; and most of all, the great amusement, or nearly, of her walk, the enviable baskets of the laundress, piled up with frilled and fluted whiteness — the certain luxury, she felt as she passed, with quick prevision, of her own dawn of glory. The greatest amusement perhaps was to recognize the pretty sentiment of earliness, the particular congruity with the hour, in the studied, selected dress of the little tripping women who were taking the day, for important advantages, while it was tender. At any rate she always brought with her, from her passage through the town, good humor enough (with the penny bunch of violets that she stuck in the front

of her dress) for whatever awaited her at Madame Carré's. She told Sherringham that her dear mistress was terribly severe, giving her the most difficult, the most exhausting exercises — showing a kind of rage for breaking her in.

"So much the better," Sherringham answered; but he asked no questions, and was glad to let the preceptress and the pupil fight it out together. He wanted, for the moment, to know as little as possible about them: he had been overdosed with knowledge, that second day he saw them together. He would send Madame Carré her money (she was really most obliging), and in the meantime he was conscious that Miriam could take care of herself. Sometimes he remarked to her that she needn't always talk "shop" to him: there were times when he was very tired of shop — of hers. Moreover, he frankly admitted that he was tired of his own, so that the restriction was not brutal. When she replied, staring, "Why, I thought you considered it as such a beautiful, interesting art!" he had no rejoinder more philosophic than "Well, I do; but there are moments when I'm sick of it, all the same." At other times he said to her: "Oh, yes, the results, the finished thing, the dish perfectly seasoned and served: not the mess of preparation — at least not always — not the experiments that spoil the material."

"I thought you thought just these questions of study, of the artistic education, as you have have called it to me, so fascinating," the girl persisted. Sometimes she was very lucid.

"Well, after all I'm not an actor myself," Sherringham answered laughing.

"You might be one if you were serious," said Miriam. To this her friend replied that Mr. Gabriel Nash ought to hear that; which made her exclaim, with a certain grimness, that she would settle *him* and his theories some day. Not to seem too inconsistent — for it was cruel to bewilder her when he had taken her up to enlighten — Sherringham repeated over that for a man like himself the interest of the whole thing depended on its being considered in a large, liberal way, with an intelligence that lifted it out of the question of the little tricks of the trade, gave it beauty and elevation. Miriam let him know that Madame Carré held that there were no *little* tricks; that everything had its importance as a means to a great end; and that if you were not willing to try to *approfondir* the reason why, in a given situation, you should scratch your nose with your left hand rather than with your right, you were not worthy to tread any stage that respected itself.

"That's very well; but if I must go into details read me a little Shelley," said the young man, in the spirit of a high *raffiné*.

"You are worse than Madame Carré; you don't know what to invent; between you you'll kill me!" the girl declared. "I think there's a secret league between you to spoil my voice, or at least to weaken my wind, before I get it. But *à la guerre comme à la guerre!* How can I read Shelley, however, when I don't understand him?"

“That’s just what I want to make you do. It’s a part of your general training. You may do without that, of course — without culture and taste and perception ; but in that case you’ll be nothing but a vulgar *cabotine*, and nothing will be of any consequence.” Sherringham had a theory that the great lyric poets (he induced her to read, and recite as well, long passages of Wordsworth and of Swinburne) would teach her many of the secrets of competent utterance, the mysteries of rhythm, the communicableness of style, the latent music of the language and the art of “composing” copious speeches and of keeping her wind in hand. He held, in perfect sincerity, that there was an indirect enlightenment which would be of the highest importance to her, and to which it was precisely, by good fortune, in his power to contribute. She would do better in proportion as she had more knowledge — even knowledge that might appear to have but a remote connection with her business. The actor’s talent was essentially a gift; a thing by itself, implanted, instinctive, accidental, equally unconnected with intellect and with virtue — Sherringham was completely of that opinion ; but it seemed to him no contradiction to consider at the same time that intellect (leaving virtue, for the moment, out of the question) might be brought into fruitful relation with it. It would be a larger thing if a better mind were projected upon it — without sacrificing the mind. So he lent Miriam

books which she never read (she was on almost irreconcilable terms with the printed page), and in the long summer days, when he had leisure, took her to the Louvre to admire the great works of painting and sculpture. Here, as on all occasions, he was struck with the queer jumble of her taste, her mixture of intelligence and puerility. He saw that she never read what he gave her, though she sometimes would have liked him to suppose so ; but in the presence of famous pictures and statues she had remarkable flashes of perception. She felt these things, she liked them, though it was always because she had an idea she could use them. The idea was often fantastic, but it showed what an eye she had to her business. "I could look just like that, if I tried." "That's the dress I mean to wear when I do Portia." Such were the observations that were apt to drop from her under the suggestion of antique marbles or when she stood before a Titian or a Bronzino.

When she uttered them, and many others besides, the effect was sometimes irritating to Sheringham, who had to reflect a little to remember that she was no more egotistical than the histrionic conscience demanded. He wondered if there were necessarily something vulgar in the histrionic conscience—something condemned only to feel the tricky personal question. Was n't it better to be perfectly stupid than to have only one eye open and wear forever, in the great face

of the world, the expression of a knowing wink? At the theatre, on the numerous July evenings when the Comédie Française played the repertory, with exponents determined the more sparse and provincial audience should have a revelation of the tradition, her appreciation was tremendously technical and showed it was not for nothing she was now in and out of Madame Carré's innermost counsels. But there were moments when even her very acuteness seemed to him to drag the matter down, to see it in a small and superficial sense. What he flattered himself that he was trying to do for her (and through her for the stage of his time, since she was the instrument, and incontestably a fine one, that had come to his hand) was precisely to lift it up, make it rare, keep it in the region of distinction and breadth. However, she was doubtless right and he was wrong, he eventually reasoned: you could afford to be vague only if you had n't a responsibility. He had fine ideas, but she was to do the acting, that is the application of them, and not he; and application was always of necessity a sort of vulgarization, a smaller thing than theory. If some day she should exhibit the great art that it was not purely fanciful to forecast for her, the subject would doubtless be sufficiently lifted up, and it would n't matter that some of the onward steps should have been lame.

This was clear to him on several occasions when she repeated or acted something for him

better than usual; then she quite carried him away, making him wish to ask no more questions, but only let her disembroil herself in her own own fashion. In these hours she gave him, fitfully but forcibly, that impression of beauty which was to be her justification. It was too soon for any general estimate of her progress; Madame Carré had at last given her an intelligent understanding, as well as a sore personal sense, of how bad she was. She had therefore begun on a new basis; she had returned to the alphabet and the drill. It was a phase of awkwardness, like the splashing of a young swimmer, but buoyancy would certainly come out of it. For the present there was, for the most part, no great alteration of the fact that when she did things according to her own idea they were not as yet, and seriously judged, worth the devil, as Madame Carré said; and when she did them according to that of her instructress they were too apt to be a gross parody of that lady's intention. None the less she gave glimpses, and her glimpses made him feel not only that she was not a fool (that was a small relief) but that he was not.

He made her stick to her English and read Shakespeare aloud to him. Mrs. Rooth had recognized the importance of an apartment in which they should be able to receive so beneficent a visitor, and was now mistress of a small salon with a balcony and a rickety flower-stand (to say nothing of a view of many roofs and chimneys), a

crooked, waxed floor, an empire clock, an *armoire à glace* (highly convenient for Miriam's posturings), and several cupboard doors, covered over, allowing for treacherous gaps, with the faded magenta paper of the wall. The thing had been easily done, for Sherringham had said, "Oh, we must have a sitting-room, for our studies, you know. I'll settle it with the landlady." Mrs. Rooth had liked his "we" (indeed, she liked everything about him), and he saw in this way that she had no insuperable objection to being under a pecuniary obligation so long as it was distinctly understood to be temporary. That he should have his money back with interest as soon as Miriam was launched was a comfort so deeply implied that it only added to intimacy. The window stood open on the little balcony, and when the sun had left it Sherringham and Miriam could linger there, leaning on the rail and talking, above the great hum of Paris, with nothing but the neighboring tiles and tall tubes to take account of. Mrs. Rooth, in limp garments, much ungirdled, was on the sofa with a novel, making good her frequent assertion that she could put up with any life that would yield her these two articles. There were romantic works that Sherringham had never read, and as to which he had vaguely wondered to what class they were addressed — the earlier productions of M. Eugène Sue, the once-fashionable compositions of Madame Sophie Gay — with which Mrs. Rooth was

familiar and which she was ready to peruse once more if she could get nothing fresher. She had always a greasy volume tucked under her while her nose was bent upon the pages in hand. She scarcely looked up even when Miriam lifted her voice to show Sherringham what she could do. These tragic or pathetic notes all went out of the window and mingled with the undecipherable concert of Paris, so that no neighbor was disturbed by them. The girl shrieked and wailed when the occasion required it, and Mrs. Rooth only turned her page, showing in this way a great æsthetic as well as a great personal trust.

She rather annoyed Sherringham by the serenity of her confidence (for a reason that he fully understood only later), save when Miriam caught an effect or a tone so well that she made him, in the pleasure of it, forget her parent was there. He continued to object to the girl's English, with the foreign patches which might pass in prose but were offensive in the recitation of verse, and he wanted to know why she could not speak like her mother. He had to do Mrs. Rooth the justice of recognizing the charm of her voice and accent, which gave a certain richness even to the foolish things she said. They were of an excellent insular tradition, full both of natural and of cultivated sweetness, and they puzzled him when other indications seemed to betray her — to relegate her to the class of the simply dreary. They were like the reverberation of far-off drawing-rooms.

The connection between the development of Miriam's genius and the necessity of an occasional excursion to the country — the charming country that lies in so many directions, beyond the Parisian *banlieue* — would not have been immediately apparent to a merely superficial observer ; but a day, and then another, at Versailles, a day at Fontainebleau and a trip, particularly harmonious and happy, to Rambouillet, took their place in Sherringham's programme as a part of the legitimate indirect culture, an agency in the formation of taste. Intimations of the grand style, for instance, would proceed in abundance from the symmetrical palace and gardens of Louis XIV. Sherringham was very fond of Versailles, and went there more than once with the ladies of the Hôtel de la Garonne. They chose quiet hours, when the fountains were dry ; and Mrs. Rooth took an armful of novels and sat on a bench in the park, flanked by clipped hedges and old statues, while her young companions strolled away, walked to the Trianon, explored the long, straight vistas of the woods. Rambouillet was vague and pleasant and idle ; they had an idea that they found suggestive associations there ; and indeed there was an old white château which contained nothing else. They found, at any rate, luncheon, and in the landscape, a charming sense of summer and of little brushed French pictures.

I have said that in these days Sherringham

wondered a good deal, and by the time his leave of absence was granted him this practice had engendered a particular speculation. He was surprised that he was not in love with Miriam Rooth, and he considered, in moments of leisure, the causes of his exemption. He had perceived from the first that she was a "nature," and each time she met his eyes the more vividly it appeared to him that her beauty was rare. You had to get the view of her face, but when you did so it was a splendid mobile mask. And the possessor of this high advantage had frankness and courage and variety and the unusual and the unexpected. She had qualities that seldom went together — impulses and shynesses, audacities and lapses, something coarse, popular, and strong, all intermingled with disdains and languors and nerves. And then, above all, she was there, she was accessible, she almost belonged to him. He reflected ingeniously that he owed his escape to a peculiar cause — the fact that they had together a positive outside object. Objective, as it were, was all their communion; not personal and selfish, but a matter of art and business and discussion. Discussion had saved him, and would save him further; for they would always have something to quarrel about. Sherringham, who was not a diplomatist for nothing; who had his reasons for steering straight and wished neither to deprive the British public of a rising star nor to exchange his actual situation for that of a

conjugal *impresario*, blessed the beneficence, the salubrity, the pure exorcism of art. At the same time, rather inconsistently, and feeling that he had a completer vision than before of the odd animal, the artist who happened to have been born a woman, he felt himself warned against a serious connection (he made a great point of the "serious") with so slippery and ticklish a creature. The two ladies had only to stay in Paris, save their candle-ends and, as Madame Carré had enjoined, practice their scales: there were apparently no autumn visits to English country-houses in prospect for Mrs. Rooth.

Sherringham parted with them on the understanding that, in London, he would look as thoroughly as possible into the question of an engagement for Miriam. The day before he began his holiday he went to see Madame Carré who said to him, "Vous devriez bien nous la laisser."

"She has got something, then?"

"She has got most things. She'll go far. It is the first time I ever was mistaken. But don't tell her so — I don't flatter her; she'll be too puffed up."

"Is she very conceited?" Sherringham asked.

"Mauvais sujet!" said Madame Carré.

It was on the journey to London that he indulged in some of those questionings of his state which I have mentioned; but I must add that by the time he reached Charing Cross (he smoked a

cigar, deferred till after the Channel, in a compartment by himself) it suddenly came over him that they were futile. Now that he had left the girl, a subversive, unpremeditated heartbeat told him — it made him hold his breath a minute in the carriage — that he had after all *not* escaped. He *was* in love with her: he had been in love with her from the first hour.

XIII.

THE drive from Harsh to the Place, as it was called thereabouts, could be achieved by swift horses in less than ten minutes; and if Mrs. Dallow's ponies were capital trotters the general high pitch of the occasion made it congruous that they should show their speed. The occasion was the polling-day, the hour after the battle. The ponies had worked, with all the rest, for the week before, passing and repassing the neat windows of the flat little town (Mrs. Dallow had the complacent belief that there was none in the kingdom in which the flower-stands looked more respectable between the stiff muslin curtains), with their mistress behind them in her low, smart trap. Very often she was accompanied by the Liberal candidate, but even when she was not the equipage seemed scarcely less to represent his pleasant, sociable confidence. It moved in a radiance of ribbons and handbills and hand-shakes and smiles; of quickened intercourse and sudden intimacy; of sympathy which assumed without presuming and gratitude which promised without soliciting. But under Julia's guidance the ponies pattered now, with no indication of a loss of freshness, along the firm, wide avenue which

wound and curved, to make up in picturesque effect for not undulating, from the gates opening straight into the town to the Palladian mansion, high, square, gray and clean, which stood, among parterres and fountains, in the centre of the park. A generous steed had been sacrificed to bring the good news from Ghent to Aix, but no such extravagance was after all necessary for communicating with Lady Agnes.

She had remained at the house, not going to the Wheatsheaf, the Liberal inn, with the others; preferring to await in privacy, and indeed in solitude, the momentous result of the poll. She had come down to Harsh with the two girls in the course of the proceedings. Julia had not thought they would do much good, but she was expansive and indulgent now, and she had liberally asked them. Lady Agnes had not a nice canvassing manner, effective as she might have been in the character of the high, benignant, affable mother — looking sweet participation, but not interfering — of the young and handsome, the shining, convincing, wonderfully clever and certainly irresistible aspirant. Grace Dormer had zeal without art, and Lady Agnes, who, during her husband's lifetime, had seen their affairs follow the satisfactory principle of a tendency to defer to supreme merit, had never really learned the lesson that voting goes by favor. However, she could pray God if she could n't flatter the cheesemonger, and Nick felt that she had stayed at

home to pray for him. I must add that Julia Dallow was too happy now, flicking her whip in the bright summer air, to say anything so ungracious even to herself as that her companion had been returned in spite of his nearest female relatives. Besides, Biddy *had* been a rosy help: she had looked persuasively pretty, in white and blue, on platforms and in recurrent carriages, out of which she had tossed, blushing and making people remember her eyes, several words that were telling for their very simplicity.

Mrs. Dallow was really too glad for any definite reflection, even for personal exultation, the vanity of recognizing her own large share of the work. Nick was in, and he was beside her, tired, silent, vague, beflowered and beribboned, and he had been splendid from beginning to end, delightfully good-humored and at the same time delightfully clever — still cleverer than she had supposed he could be. The sense that she had helped his cleverness and that she had been repaid by it, or by his gratitude (it came to the same thing), in a way she appreciated, was not triumphant and jealous: it was lost, for the present, in the general cheerful break of the long tension. So nothing passed between them on their way to the house; there was no sound in the park but the pleasant rustle of summer (it seemed an ap-
plausive murmur) and the swift progress of the vehicle.

Lady Agnes already knew, for as soon as the

result was declared Nick had dispatched a man on horseback to her, carrying the figures on a scrawled card. He had been far from getting away at once, having to respond to the hubbub of acclamation, to speak yet again, to thank his electors individually and collectively, to chaff the Tories, to be carried hither and yon, and above all to pretend that the interest of the business was now greater for him than ever. If he said never a word after he put himself in Julia's hands to go home, perhaps it was partly because the consciousness began to glimmer within him that that interest had on the contrary now suddenly diminished. He wanted to see his mother, because he knew she wanted to see him, to fold him close in her arms. They had been open there for that purpose for the last half hour, and her expectancy, now no longer an ache of suspense, was the reason of Julia's round pace. Yet this very expectancy somehow made Nick wince a little. Meeting his mother was like being elected over again.

The others had not come back yet, and Lady Agnes was alone in the large bright drawing-room. When Nick went in with Mrs. Dallow he saw her at the further end; she had evidently been walking to and fro, the whole length of it, and her tall, upright black figure seemed in possession of the fair vastness, like an exclamation-point at the bottom of a blank page. The room, rich and simple, was a place of perfection as well

as of splendor in delicate tints, with precious specimens of French furniture of the last century ranged against walls of pale brocade, and here and there a small, almost priceless picture. George Dallow had made it, caring for these things and liking to talk about them (scarcely about anything else); so that it appeared to represent him still, what was best in his kindly, limited nature — a friendly, competent, tiresome insistence upon purity and homogeneity. Nick Dormer could hear him yet, and could see him, too fat and with a congenital thickness in his speech, lounging there in loose clothes, with his eternal cigarette. “Now, my dear fellow, *that’s* what I call form: I don’t know what you call it” — that was the way he used to begin. The room was full of flowers in rare vases, but it looked like a place of which the beauty would have had a sweet odor even without them.

Lady Agnes had taken a white rose from one of the clusters and was holding it to her face, which was turned to the door, as Nick crossed the threshold. The expression of her figure instantly told him (he saw the creased card that he had sent her lying on one of the beautiful bare tables) how she had been sailing up and down in a majesty of satisfaction. The inflation of her long, plain dress, the brightened dimness of her proud race, were still in the air. In a moment he had kissed her and was being kissed, not in quick repetition, but in tender prolongation, with

which the perfume of the white rose was mixed. But there was something else, too — her sweet, smothered words in his ear: "Oh, my boy, my boy — oh, your father, your father!" Neither the sense of pleasure nor that of pain, with Lady Agnes (and indeed with most of the persons with whom this history is concerned), was a liberation of chatter; so that for a minute all she said again was, "I think of Sir Nicholas. I wish he were here;" addressing the words to Julia, who had wandered forward without looking at the mother and son.

"Poor Sir Nicholas!" said Mrs. Dallow, vaguely.

"Did you make another speech?" Lady Agnes asked.

"I don't know; did I?" Nick inquired.

"I don't know!" Mrs. Dallow replied, with her back turned, doing something to her hat before the glass.

"Oh, I can fancy the confusion, the bewilderment!" said Lady Agnes, in a tone rich in political reminiscences.

"It was really immense fun!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear Julia!" Lady Agnes went on. Then she added, "It was you who made it sure."

"There are a lot of people coming to dinner," said Julia.

"Perhaps you'll have to speak again," Lady Agnes smiled at her son.

"Thank you; I like the way you talk about it!" cried Nick. "I'm like Iago: 'from this time forth I never will speak word!'"

"Don't say that, Nick," said his mother, gravely.

"Don't be afraid; he'll jabber like a magpie!" And Mrs. Dallow went out of the room.

Nick had flung himself upon a sofa with an air of weariness, though not of completely vanished cheer; and Lady Agnes stood before him, fingering her rose and looking down at him. His eyes looked away from hers; they seemed fixed on something she could not see. "I hope you've thanked Julia," Lady Agnes remarked.

"Why, of course, mother."

"She has done as much as if you had n't been sure."

"I was n't in the least sure — and she has done everything."

"She has been too good — but *we*'ve done something. I hope you don't leave out your father," Lady Agnes amplified, as Nick's glance appeared for a moment to question her "*we*."

"Never, never!" Nick uttered these words perhaps a little mechanically, but the next minute he continued, as if he had suddenly been moved to think what he could say that would give his mother most pleasure: "Of course his name has worked for me. Gone as he is, he is still a living force." He felt a good deal of a hypocrite, but one didn't win a seat every day in the year. Probably, indeed, he should never win another.

"He hears you, he watches you, he rejoices in you," Lady Agnes declared.

This idea was oppressive to Nick — that of the rejoicing almost as much as of the watching. He had made his concession, but, with a certain impulse to divert his mother from following up her advantage, he broke out: "Julia's a tremendously effective woman."

"Of course she is!" answered Lady Agnes, knowingly.

"Her charming appearance is half the battle," said Nick, explaining a little coldly what he meant. But he felt that his coldness was an inadequate protection to him when he heard his mother observe, with something of the same sapience —

"A woman is always effective when she likes a person."

It discomposed him to be described as a person liked, and by a woman; and he asked abruptly: "When are you going away?"

"The first moment that's civil — to-morrow morning. *You'll* stay here, I hope."

"Stay? What shall I stay for?"

"Why, you might stay to thank her."

"I have everything to do."

"I thought everything was done," said Lady Agnes.

"Well, that's why," her son replied, not very lucidly. "I want to do other things — quite other things. I should like to take the next train." And Nick looked at his watch.

"When there are people coming to dinner to meet you?"

"They'll meet *You* — that's better."

"I'm sorry any one is coming," Lady Agnes said, in a tone unencouraging to a deviation from the reality of things. "I wish we were alone — just as a family. It would please Julia to-day to feel that we *are* one. Do stay with her to-morrow."

"How will that do, when she's alone?"

"She won't be alone, with Mrs. Gresham."

"Mrs. Gresham does n't count."

"That's precisely why I want you to stop. And her cousin, almost her brother: what an idea that it won't do! Have n't you stayed here before, when there has been no one?"

"I have never stayed much, and there have always been people. At any rate, now it's different."

"It's just because it is different. Besides, it is n't different, and it never was," said Lady Agnes, more incoherent, in her earnestness, than it often happened to her to be. "She always liked you, and she likes you now more than ever, if you call that different!" Nick got up at this and, without meeting her eyes, walked to one of the windows, where he stood with his back turned, looking out on the great greenness. She watched him a moment, and she might well have been wishing, while he remained gazing there, as it appeared, that it would come to him with the same

force as it had come to herself (very often before, but during these last days more than ever), that the level lands of Harsh, stretching away before the window, the French garden, with its symmetry, its screens and its statues, and a great many more things, of which these were the superficial token, were Julia's very own, to do with exactly as she liked. No word of appreciation or envy, however, dropped from the young man's lips, and his mother presently went on: "What could be more natural than that, after your triumphant contest, you and she should have lots to settle and to talk about — no end of practical questions, no end of business? Aren't you her member, and can't her member pass a day with her, and she a great proprietor?"

Nick turned round at this, with an odd expression. "*Her* member — am I hers?"

Lady Agnes hesitated a moment; she felt that she had need of all her tact. "Well, if the place is hers, and you represent the place —" she began. But she went no further, for Nick interrupted her with a laugh.

"What a droll thing to 'represent,' when one thinks of it! And what does *it* represent, poor stupid little borough, with its smell of meal and its curiously fat-faced inhabitants? Did you ever see such a collection of fat faces, turned up at the hustings? They looked like an enormous sofa, with the cheeks for the gathers and the eyes for the buttons."

"Oh, well, the next time you shall have a great town," Lady Agnes replied, smiling and feeling that she *was* tactful.

"It will only be a bigger sofa! I'm joking, of course," Nick went on, "and I ought to be ashamed of myself. They have done me the honor to elect me, and I shall never say a word that's not civil about them, poor dears. But even a new member may joke with his mother."

"I wish you'd be serious with your mother," said Lady Agnes, going nearer to him.

"The difficulty is that I'm two men; it's the strangest thing that ever was," Nick pursued, bending his bright face upon her. "I'm two quite distinct human beings, who have scarcely a point in common; not even the memory, on the part of one, of the achievements or the adventures of the other. One man wins the seat, but it's the other fellow who sits in it."

"Oh, Nick, don't spoil your victory by your perversity!" Lady Agnes cried, clasping her hands to him.

"I went through it with great glee — I won't deny that; it excited me, it interested me, it amused me. When once I was in it I liked it. But now that I'm out of it again —"

"Out of it?" His mother stared. "Isn't the whole point that you're in?"

"Ah, now I'm only in the House of Commons."

For an instant Lady Agnes seemed not to

understand and to be on the point of laying her finger quickly to her lips with a "Hush!" as if the late Sir Nicholas might have heard the "only." Then, as if a comprehension of the young man's words promptly superseded that impulse, she replied with force: "You will be in the Lords the day you determine to get there."

This futile remark made Nick laugh afresh, and not only laugh, but kiss her, which was always an intenser form of mystification for poor Lady Agnes, and apparently the one he liked best to practice; after which he said, "The odd thing is, you know, that Harsh has no wants. At least it's not sharply, not eloquently conscious of them. We all talked them over together, and I promised to carry them in my heart of hearts. But upon my word I can't remember one of them. Julia says the wants of Harsh are simply the national wants—rather a pretty phrase for Julia. She means *she* does everything for the place; *she's* really their member, and this house in which we stand is their legislative chamber. Therefore the *lacunæ* that I have undertaken to fill up are the national wants. It will be rather a job to rectify some of them, won't it? I don't represent the appetites of Harsh—Harsh is gorged. I represent the ideas of my party. That's what Julia says."

"Oh, never mind what Julia says!" Lady Agnes broke out, impatiently. This impatience made it singular that the very next words she

uttered should be : " My dearest son, I wish to heaven you 'd marry her. It would be so fitting now ! " she added.

" Why now ? " asked Nick, frowning.

" She has shown you such sympathy, such devotion."

" Is it for that she has shown it ? "

" Ah, you might *feel* — I can't tell you ! " said Lady Agnes, reproachfully.

Nick blushed at this, as if what he did feel was the reproach. " Must I marry her because you like her ? "

" I ? Why, we are *all* as fond of her as we can be."

" Dear mother, I hope that any woman I ever may marry will be a person agreeable not only to you, but also, since you make a point of it, to Grace and Biddy. But I must tell you this — that I shall marry no woman I am not unmistakably in love with."

" And why are you not in love with Julia — charming, clever, generous as she is ? " Lady Agnes laid her hands on him — she held him tight. " My darling Nick, if you care anything in the world to make me happy, you 'll stay over here to-morrow and be nice to her."

" Be nice to her ? Do you mean propose to her ? "

" With a single word, with the glance of an eye, the movement of your little finger " — and Lady Agnes paused, looking intensely, implor-

ingly up into Nick's face — "in less time than it takes me to say what I say now, you may have it all." As he made no answer, only returning her look, she added insistently, "You know she's a fine creature — you know she is!"

"Dearest mother, what I seem to know better than anything else in the world is that I love my freedom. I set it far above everything."

"Your freedom? What freedom is there in being poor? Talk of that when Julia puts everything that she possesses at your feet!"

"I can't talk of it, mother — it's too terrible an idea. And I can't talk of *her*, nor of what I think of her. You must leave that to me. I do her perfect justice."

"You don't, or you'd marry her to-morrow. You would feel that the opportunity is exquisitely rare, with everything in the world to make it perfect. Your father would have valued it for you beyond everything. Think a little what would have given *him* pleasure. That's what I meant when I spoke just now of us all. It was n't of Grace and Biddy I was thinking — fancy! — it was of him. He's with you always; he takes with you, at your side, every step that you take yourself. He would bless devoutly your marriage to Julia; he would feel what it would be for you and for us all. I ask for no sacrifice, and he would ask for none. We only ask that you don't commit the crime —"

Nick Dormer stopped her with another kiss;

he murmured, "Mother, mother, mother!" as he bent over her.

He wished her not to go on, to let him off; but the deep deprecation in his voice did not prevent her saying: "You know it — you know it perfectly. All, and more than all that I can tell you, you know."

He drew her closer, kissed her again, held her there as he would have held a child in a paroxysm, soothing her silently till it should pass away. Her emotion had brought the tears to her eyes; she dried them as she disengaged herself. The next moment, however, she resumed, attacking him again:

"For a public man she would be the ideal companion. She's made for public life; she's made to shine, to be concerned in great things, to occupy a high position and to help him on. She would help you in everything, as she has helped you in this. Together, there is nothing you could n't do. You can have the first house in England — yes, the first! What freedom *is* there in being poor? How can you do anything without money, and what money can you make for yourself — what money will ever come to you? That's the crime — to throw away such an instrument of power, such a blessed instrument of good."

"It is n't everything to be rich, mother," said Nick, looking at the floor in a certain patient way, with a provisional docility and his hands in his pockets. "And it is n't so fearful to be poor."

"It's vile — it's abject. Don't I know?"

"Are you in such acute want?" Nick asked, smiling.

"Ah, don't make me explain what you have only to look at to see!" his mother returned, as if with a richness of allusion to dark elements in her fate.

"Besides," Nick went on, "there's other money in the world than Julia's. I might come by some of that."

"Do you mean Mr. Carteret's?" The question made him laugh, as her feeble reference, five minutes before, to the House of Lords had done. But she pursued, too full of her idea to take account of such a poor substitute for an answer: "Let me tell you one thing, for I have known Charles Carteret much longer than you, and I understand him better. There's nothing you could do that would do you more good with him than to marry Julia. I know the way he looks at things, and I know exactly how that would strike him. It would please him, it would charm him; it would be the thing that would most prove to him that you're in earnest. You need to do something of that sort."

"Have n't I come in for Harsh?" asked Nick.

"Oh, he's very canny. He likes to see people rich. *Then* he believes in them — then he's likely to believe more. He's kind to you because you're your father's son; but I'm sure your being poor takes just so much off."

"He can remedy that so easily," said Nick, smiling still. "Is being kept by Julia what you call making an effort for myself?"

Lady Agnes hesitated; then, "You need n't insult Julia!" she replied.

"Moreover, if I've *her* money, I sha'n't want his," Nick remarked.

Again his mother waited an instant before answering; after which she produced: "And pray would n't you wish to be independent?"

"You're delightful, dear mother — you're very delightful! I particularly like your conception of independence. Does n't it occur to you that at a pinch I might improve my fortune by some other means than by making a mercenary marriage or by currying favor with a rich old gentleman? Does n't it occur to you that I might work?"

"Work at politics? How does that make money, honourably?"

"I don't mean at politics."

"What do you mean, then?" Lady Agnes demanded, looking at him as if she challenged him to phrase it if he dared. Her eye appeared to have a certain effect upon him, for he remained silent, and she continued: "Are you elected or not?"

"It seems a dream," said Nick.

"If you are, act accordingly, and don't mix up things that are as wide asunder as the poles!" She spoke with sternness, and his silence might

have been an admission that her sternness was wholesome to him. Possibly she was touched by it; at any rate, after a few moments, during which nothing more passed between them, she appealed to him in a gentler and more anxious key, which had this virtue to touch him, that he knew it was absolutely the first time in her life Lady Agnes had begged for anything. She had never been obliged to beg; she had got on without it and most things had come to her. He might judge, therefore, in what a light she regarded this boon for which, in her old age, she humbled herself to be a suitor. There was such a pride in her that he could feel what it cost her to go on her knees even to her son. He did judge how it was in his power to gratify her; and as he was generous and imaginative he was stirred and shaken as it came over him in a wave of figurative suggestion that he might make up to her for many things. He scarcely needed to hear her ask, with a pleading wail that was almost tragic: "Don't you see how things have turned out for us; don't you know how unhappy I am — don't you know what a bitterness —?" She stopped for a moment, with a sob in her voice, and he recognized vividly this last tribulation, the unhealed wound of her bereavement and the way she had sunken from eminence to flatness. "You know what Percival is and the comfort I have from him. You know the property and what he is doing with it and what comfort I get

from *that* ! Everything's dreary but what you can do for us. Everything's odious, down to living in a hole with one's girls who don't marry. Grace is impossible — I don't know what's the matter with her ; no one will look at her, and she's so conceited with it — sometimes I feel as if I could beat her ! And Biddy will never marry, and we are three dismal women in a filthy house ; and what are three dismal women, more or less, in London ? ”

So, with an unexpected rage of self-exposure, Lady Agnes talked of her disappointments and troubles, tore away the veil from her sadness and soreness. It almost frightened Nick to perceive how she hated her life, though at another time it might have amused him to note how she despised her gardenless house. Of course it was not a country-house, and Lady Agnes could not get used to that. Better than he could do — for it was the sort of thing into which, in any case, a woman enters more than a man — she felt what a lift into brighter air, what a regilding of his sisters' possibilities, his marriage to Julia would effect for them. He could n't trace the difference, but his mother saw it all as a shining picture. She made the vision shine before him now, somehow, as she stood there like a poor woman crying for a kindness. What was filial in him, all the piety that he owed, especially to the revived spirit of his father, more than ever present on a day of such public pledges, was capable from one mo-

ment to the other of trembling into sympathetic response. He had the gift, so embarrassing when it is a question of consistent action, of seeing in an imaginative, interesting light anything that illustrated forcibly the life of another : such things effected a union with something in *his* life, and the recognition of them was ready to become a form of enthusiasm in which there was no consciousness of sacrifice — none scarcely of merit.

Rapidly, at present, this change of scene took place before his spiritual eye. He found himself believing, because his mother communicated the belief, that it was in his option to transform the social outlook of the three women who clung to him and who declared themselves dismal. This was not the highest kind of inspiration, but it was moving, and it associated itself with dim confusions of figures in the past — figures of authority and expectancy. Julia's wide kingdom opened out around him, making the future almost a dazzle of happy power. His mother and sisters floated in the rosy element with beaming faces, in transfigured safety. "The first house in England," she had called it ; but it might be the first house in Europe, the first house in the world, by the fine air and the high humanities that should fill it. Everything that was beautiful in the place where he stood took on a more delicate charm ; the house rose over his head like a museum of exquisite rewards, and the image of poor George Dallow hovered there obsequious, as if to confess

that he had only been the modest, tasteful forerunner, appointed to set it all in order and punctually retire. Lady Agnes's tone penetrated further into Nick's spirit than it had done yet, as she syllabled to him, supremely, "Don't desert us — don't desert us."

"Don't desert you?"

"Be great — be great," said his mother. "I'm old, I've lived, I've seen. Go in for a great material position. That will simplify everything else."

"I will do what I can for you — anything, everything I can. Trust me — leave me alone," said Nick Dormer.

"And you'll stay over — you'll spend the day with her?"

"I'll stay till she turns me out!"

His mother had hold of his hand again now; she raised it to her lips and kissed it. "My dearest son, my only joy!" Then, "I don't see how you can resist her," she added.

"No more do I!"

Lady Agnes looked round the great room with a soft exhalation of gratitude and hope. "If you're so fond of art, what art is equal to all this? The joy of living in the midst of it — of seeing the finest works every day! You'll have everything the world can give."

"That's exactly what was just passing in my own mind. It's too much."

"Don't be selfish!"

"Selfish?" Nick repeated.

"Don't be unselfish, then. You'll share it with us."

"And with Julia a little, I hope," said Nick.

"God bless you!" cried his mother, looking up at him. Her eyes were detained by the sudden perception of something in his own that was not clear to her; but before she had time to ask for an explanation of it Nick inquired, abruptly:

"Why do you talk so of poor Biddy? Why won't she marry?"

"You had better ask Peter Sherringham," said Lady Agnes.

"What has he got to do with it?"

"How odd of you to ask, when it's so plain how she thinks of him that it's a matter of common chaff!"

"Yes, we've made it so, and she takes it like an angel. But Peter likes her."

"Does he? Then it's the more shame to him to behave as he does. He had better leave his actresses alone. That's the love of art, too!" laughed Lady Agnes.

"Biddy's so charming — she'll marry some one else."

"Never, if she loves him. But Julia will bring it about — Julia will help her," said Lady Agnes, more cheerfully. "That's what you'll do for us — that *she* 'll do everything!"

"Why then more than now?" Nick asked.

"Because we shall be yours."

"You are mine already."

"Yes, but she isn't. However, she's as good!" exulted Lady Agnes.

"She'll turn me out of the house," said Nick.

"Come and tell me when she does! But there she is — go to her!" And she gave him a push toward one of the windows that stood open to the terrace. Mrs. Dallow had become visible outside; she passed slowly along the terrace, with her long shadow. "Go to her," Lady Agnes repeated — "she's waiting for you."

Nick went out with the air of a man who was as ready to pass that way as any other, and at the same moment his two sisters, freshly restored from the excitements of the town, came into the room from another quarter.

"We go home to-morrow, but Nick will stay a day or two," their mother said to them.

"Dear old Nick!" Grace ejaculated, looking at Lady Agnes.

"He's going to speak," the latter went on. "But don't mention it."

"Don't mention it?" said Biddy, staring. "Hasn't he spoken enough, poor fellow?"

"I mean to Julia," Lady Agnes replied.

"Don't you understand, you goose?" Grace exclaimed to her sister.

XIV.

THE next morning brought Nick Dormer many letters and telegrams, and his coffee was placed beside him in his room, where he remained until noon answering these communications. When he came out he learned that his mother and sisters had left the house. This information was given him by Mrs. Gresham, whom he found at one of the tables in the library, dealing with her own voluminous budget. She was a lady who received thirty letters a day, the subject-matter of which, as well as of her punctual answers, in a hand that would have been "ladylike" in a manageress, was a puzzle to those who observed her.

She told Nick that Lady Agnes had not been willing to disturb him at his work to say good-by, knowing she should see him in a day or two in town. Nick was amused at the way his mother had stolen off; as if she feared that further conversation might weaken the spell she believed herself to have wrought. The place was cleared, moreover, of its other visitors, so that, as Mrs. Gresham said, the fun was at an end. This lady expressed the idea that the fun was, after all, rather a bore. At any rate, now they could rest,

Mrs. Dallow and Nick and she, and she was glad Nick was going to stay for a little quiet. She liked Harsh best when it was not *en fête*: then one could see what a sympathetic old place it was. She hoped Nick was not dreadfully tired; she feared Julia was completely done up. Mrs. Dallow, however, had transported her exhaustion to the grounds — she was wandering about somewhere. She thought more people would be coming to the house, people from the town, people from the country, and had gone out so as not to have to see them. She had not gone far — Nick could easily find her. Nick intimated that he himself was not eager for more people, whereupon Mrs. Gresham said, rather archly, smiling:

“And of course you hate *me* for being here.” He made some protest, and she added, “But I’m almost a part of the house, you know — I’m one of the chairs or tables.” Nick declared that he had never seen a house so well furnished, and Mrs. Gresham said: “I believe there *are* to be some people to dinner: rather an interference, is n’t it? Julia lives so in public. But it’s all for you.” And after a moment she added, “It’s a wonderful constitution.” Nick at first failed to seize her allusion — he thought it a retarded political reference, a sudden tribute to the great unwritten instrument by which they were all governed. He was on the point of saying, “The British? Wonderful!” when he perceived that the intention of his interlocutress was to praise

Mrs. Dallow's fine robustness. "The surface so delicate, the action so easy, yet the frame of steel."

Nick left Mrs. Gresham to her correspondence and went out of the course; wondering, as he walked, whether she wanted him to do the same thing that his mother wanted, so that her words had been intended for a prick — whether even the two ladies had talked over their desire together. Mrs. Gresham was a married woman who was usually taken for a widow; mainly because she was perpetually "sent for" by her friends, and her friends never sent for Mr. Gresham. She came, in every case, and had the air of being *répandue* at the expense of dingier belongings. Her figure was admired — that is it was sometimes mentioned — and she dressed as if it was expected of her to be smart, like a young woman in a shop or a servant much in view. She slipped in and out, accompanied at the piano, talked to the neglected visitors, walked in the rain, and, after the arrival of the post, usually had conferences with her hostess, during which she stroked her chin and looked familiarly responsible. It was her peculiarity that people were always saying things to her in a lowered voice. She had all sorts of acquaintances, and in small establishments she sometimes wrote the *menus*. Great ones, on the other hand, had no terrors for her: she had seen too many. No one had ever discovered whether any one else paid her.

If Lady Agnes, in a lowered tone, had discussed with her the propriety of a union between the mistress of Harsh and the hope of the Dormers, our young man could take the circumstance for granted without irritation and even with cursory indulgence ; for he was not unhappy now, and his spirit was light and clear. The summer day was splendid, and the world, as he looked at it from the terrace, offered no more worrying ambiguity than a vault of airy blue arching over a lap of solid green. The wide, still trees in the park appeared to be waiting for some daily inspection, and the rich fields, with their official frill of hedges, to rejoice in the light which approved them as named and numbered acres. The place looked happy to Nick, and he was struck with its having a charm to which he had perhaps not hitherto done justice ; something of the impression that he had received, when he was younger, from showy "views" of fine country-seats, as if they had been brighter and more established than life. There were a couple of peacocks on the terrace, and his eye was caught by the gleam of the swans on a distant lake, where there was also a little temple on an island ; and these objects fell in with his humor, which at another time might have been ruffled by them as representing the Philistine in ornament.

It was certainly a proof of youth and health on his part that his spirits had risen as the tumult rose, and that after he had taken his jump into

the turbid waters of a contested election he had been able to tumble and splash, not only without a sense of awkwardness, but with a considerable capacity for the frolic. Tepid as we saw him in Paris, he had found his relation to his opportunity surprisingly altered by his little journey across the Channel. He saw things in a new perspective, and he breathed an air that excited him unexpectedly. There was something in it that went to his head — an element that his mother and his sisters, his father from beyond the grave, Julia Dallow, the Liberal party and a hundred friends were both secretly and overtly occupied in pumping into it. If he was vague about success he liked the fray, and he had a general rule that when one was in a muddle there was refreshment in action. The embarrassment, that is the revival of skepticism, which might produce an inconsistency shameful to exhibit and yet very difficult to conceal, was safe enough to come later indeed, at the risk of making our young man appear a purely whimsical personage: I may hint that some such sickly glow had even now begun to color one quarter of his mental horizon.

I am afraid, moreover, that I have no better excuse for him than the one he had touched on in the momentous conversation with his mother which I have thought it useful to reproduce in full. He was conscious of a double nature; there were two men in him, quite separate, whose leading features had little in common and each

of whom insisted on having an independent turn at life. Meanwhile, if he was adequately aware that the bed of his moral existence would need a good deal of making over if he was to lie upon it without unseemly tossing, he was also alive to the propriety of not parading his inconsistencies, not letting his unrectified interests become a spectacle to the vulgar. He had none of that wish to appear complicated which is at the bottom of most forms of fatuity ; he was perfectly willing to pass as simple ; he only aspired to be continuous. If you were not really simple, this presented difficulties ; but he would have assented to the proposition that you must be as clever as you can and that a high use of cleverness is in consuming the smoke of your inner fire. The fire was the great thing, and not the chimney. He had no view of life which counted out the need of learning ; it was teaching, rather ; as to which he was conscious of no particular mission. He liked life, liked it immensely, and was willing to study the ways and means of it with a certain patience. He cherished the usual wise monitions, such as that one was not to make a fool of one's self and that one should not carry on one's subjective experiments in public. It was because, as yet, he liked life in general better than it was clear to him that he liked any particular branch of it, that on the occasion of a constituency's holding out a cordial hand to him, while it extended another in a different direction, a certain

bloom of boyhood that was on him had not resisted the idea of a match.

He rose to it as he had risen to matches at school, for his boyishness could take a pleasure in an inconsiderate show of agility. He could meet electors and conciliate bores and compliment women and answer questions and roll off speeches and chaff adversaries, because it was amusing and slightly dangerous, like playing football or ascending an Alp — pastimes for which nature had conferred on him an aptitude not so very different in kind from a gallant readiness on platforms. There were two voices which told him that all this was not really action at all, but only a pusillanimous imitation of it: one of them made itself fitfully audible in the depths of his own spirit and the other spoke in the equivocal accents of a very crabbed hand, from a letter of four pages by Gabriel Nash. However, Nick acted as much as possible under the circumstances, and that was rectifying — it brought with it enjoyment and a working faith. He had not gone counter to the axiom that in a case of doubt one was to hold off; for that applied to choice, and he had not at present the slightest pretension to choosing. He knew he was lifted along, that what he was doing was not first-rate, that nothing was settled by it and that if there was essentially a problem in his life it would only grow tougher with keeping. But if doing one's sum to-morrow instead of to-day does not make the sum easier, it at least makes to-day so.

Sometimes, in the course of the following fortnight, it seemed to him that he had gone in for Harsh because he was sure he should lose ; sometimes he foresaw that he should win precisely to punish him for having tried and for his want of candor ; and when presently he did win, he was almost frightened at his success. Then it appeared to him that he had done something even worse than not choose — he had let others choose for him. The beauty of it was that they had chosen with only their own object in their eye : for what did they know about his strange alternative ? He was rattled about so for a fortnight (Julia took care of that) that he had no time to think save when he tried to remember a quotation or an American story, and all his life became an overflow of verbiage. Thought retreated before increase of sound, which had to be pleasant and eloquent, and even superficially coherent, without its aid. Nick himself was surprised at the airs he could play ; and often when, the last thing at night, he shut the door of his room, he mentally exclaimed that he had had no idea he was such a mountebank.

I must add that if this reflection did not occupy him long, and if no meditation, after his return from Paris, held him for many moments, there was a reason better even than that he was tired, or busy, or excited by the agreeable combination of hits and hurrahs. That reason was simply Mrs. Dallow, who had suddenly become a still

larger fact in his consciousness than active politics. She *was*, indeed, active politics ; that is, if the politics were his, how little soever, the activity was hers. She had ways of showing she was a clever woman that were better than saying clever things, which only prove at the most that one would be clever if one could. The accomplished fact itself was the demonstration that Mrs. Dallow could ; and when Nick came to his senses, after the proclamation of the victor and the cessation of the noise, her figure was, of all the queer phantasmagoria, the most substantial thing that survived. She had been always there, passing, repassing, before him, beside him, behind him. She had made the business infinitely prettier than it would have been without her, added music and flowers and ices, a charm, and converted it into a social game that had a strain of the heroic in it. It was a garden-party with something at stake, or to celebrate something in advance, with the people let in. The concluded affair had bequeathed to him not only a seat in the House of Commons, but a perception of what women may do, in high embodiments, and an abyss of intimacy with one woman in particular.

She had wrapped him up in something, he didn't know what — a sense of facility, an overpowering fragrance — and they had moved together in an immense fraternity. There had been no love-making, no contact that was only personal, no vulgarity of flirtation : the hurry of

the days and the sharpness with which they both tended to an outside object had made all that irrelevant. It was as if she had been too near for him to see her separate from himself ; but none the less, when he now drew breath and looked back, what had happened met his eyes as a composed picture — a picture of which the subject was inveterately Julia and her ponies : Julia wonderfully fair and fine, holding her head more than ever in the manner characteristic of her, brilliant, benignant, waving her whip, cleaving the crowd, thanking people with her smile, carrying him beside her, carrying him to his doom. He had not supposed that in so few days he had driven about with her so much ; but the image of it was there, in his consulted conscience, as well as in a personal glow not yet chilled : it looked large as it rose before him. The things his mother had said to him made a rich enough frame for it, and the whole impression, that night, had kept him much awake.

XV.

WHILE, after leaving Mrs. Gresham, he was hesitating which way to go and was on the point of hailing a gardener to ask if Mrs. Dallow had been seen, he noticed, as a spot of color in an expanse of shrubbery, a far-away parasol moving in the direction of the lake. He took his course that way, across the park, and as the bearer of the parasol was strolling slowly it was not five minutes before he had joined her. He went to her soundlessly over the grass (he had been whistling at first, but as he got nearer he stopped), and it was not till he was close to her that she looked round. He had watched her moving as if she were turning things over in her mind, brushing the smooth walks and the clean turf with her dress, slowly making her parasol revolve on her shoulder and carrying in the hand which hung beside her a book which he perceived to be a monthly review.

"I came out to get away," she remarked when he had begun to walk with her.

"Away from me?"

"Ah, that's impossible," said Mrs. Dallow. Then she added, "The day is so nice."

"Lovely weather," Nick dropped. "You want to get away from Mrs. Gresham, I suppose."

Mrs. Dallow was silent a moment. "From everything!"

"Well, I want to get away too."

"It has been such a racket. Listen to the dear birds."

"Yes, our noise is n't so good as theirs," said Nick. "I feel as if I had been married and had shoes and rice thrown after me," he went on. "But not to you, Julia — nothing so good as that."

Mrs. Dallow made no answer to this; she only turned her eyes on the ornamental water, which stretched away at their right. In a moment she exclaimed, "How nasty the lake looks!" and Nick recognized in the tone of the words a manifestation of that odd shyness — a perverse stiffness at a moment when she probably only wanted to be soft — which, taken in combination with her other qualities, was so far from being displeasing to him that it represented her nearest approach to extreme charm. *He* was not shy now, for he considered, this morning, that he saw things very straight and in a sense altogether superior and delightful. This enabled him to be generously sorry for his companion, if he were the reason of her being in any degree uncomfortable, and yet left him to enjoy the prettiness of some of the signs by which her discomfort was revealed. He would not insist on anything yet: so he observed

that his cousin's standard in lakes was too high, and then talked a little about his mother and the girls, their having gone home, his not having seen them that morning, Lady Agnes's deep satisfaction in his victory and the fact that she would be obliged to "do something" for the autumn — take a house, or something.

"I'll lend her a house," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Oh, Julia, Julia!" Nick exclaimed.

But Mrs. Dallow paid no attention to his exclamation; she only held up her review and said: "See what I have brought with me to read — Mr. Hoppus's article."

"That's right; then *I* sha'n't have to. You'll tell me about it." He uttered this without believing that she had meant or wished to read the article, which was entitled "The Revision of the British Constitution," in spite of her having encumbered herself with the stiff, fresh magazine. He was conscious that she was not in want of such mental occupation as periodical literature could supply. They walked along and then he added, "But is that what we are in for — reading Mr. Hoppus? Is that the sort of thing that constituents expect? Or even worse, pretending to have read him when one has n't? Oh, what a tangled web we weave!"

"People are talking about it. One has to know. It's the article of the month."

Nick looked at his companion askance a moment. "You say things every now and then for

which I could kill you. 'The article of the month,' for instance: I could kill you for that."

"Well, kill me!" Mrs. Dallow exclaimed.

"Let me carry your book," Nick rejoined, irrelevantly. The hand in which she held it was on the side of her on which he was walking, and he put out his own hand to take it. But for a couple of minutes she forbore to give it up, and they held it together, swinging it a little. Before she surrendered it he inquired where she was going.

"To the island," she answered.

"Well, I'll go with you — and I'll kill you there."

"The things I say are the right things," said Mrs. Dallow.

"It's just the right things that are wrong. It's because you're so political," Nick went on. "It's your horrible ambition. The woman who has a salon should have read the article of the month. See how one dreadful thing leads to another."

"There are some things that lead to nothing."

"No doubt — no doubt. And how are you going to get over to your island?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't there a boat?"

"I don't know."

Nick had paused a moment, to look round for the boat, but Mrs. Dallow walked on, without turning her head. "Can you row?" her companion asked.

"Don't you know I can do everything?"

"Yes, to be sure. That's why I want to kill you. There's the boat."

"Shall you drown me?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"Oh, let me perish with you!" Nick answered with a sigh. The boat had been hidden from them by the bole of a great tree, which rose from the grass at the water's edge. It was moored to a small place of embarkation and was large enough to hold as many persons as were likely to wish to visit at once the little temple in the middle of the lake, which Nick liked because it was absurd and Mrs. Dallow had never had a particular esteem for. The lake, fed by a natural spring, was a liberal sheet of water, measured by the scale of park scenery; and though its principal merit was that, taken at a distance, it gave a gleam of abstraction to the concrete verdure, doing the office of an open eye in a dull face, it could also be approached without derision on a sweet summer morning, when it made a lapping sound and reflected candidly various things that were probably finer than itself — the sky, the great trees, the flight of birds.

A man of taste, a hundred years before, coming back from Rome, had caused a small ornamental structure to be erected, on artificial foundations, on its bosom, and had endeavored to make this architectural pleasantry as nearly as possible a reminiscence of the small ruined rotunda which stands on the bank of the Tiber and

is declared by *ciceroni* to have been dedicated to Vesta. It was circular, it was roofed with old tiles, it was surrounded by white columns and it was considerably dilapidated. George Dallow had taken an interest in it (it reminded him not in the least of Rome, but of other things that he liked), and had amused himself with restoring it.

"Give me your hand; sit there, and I'll ferry you," Nick Dormer said.

Mrs. Dallow complied, placing herself opposite to him in the boat; but as he took up the paddles she declared that she preferred to remain on the water — there was too much malice prepense in the temple. He asked her what she meant by that, and she said it was ridiculous to withdraw to an island a few feet square on purpose to meditate. She had nothing to meditate about which required so much attitude.

"On the contrary, it would be just to change the *pose*. It's what we have been doing for a week that's attitude; and to be for half an hour where nobody's looking and one hasn't to keep it up is just what I wanted to put in an idle, irresponsible day for. I am not keeping it up now — I suppose you've noticed," Nick went on, as they floated and he scarcely dipped the oars.

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Dallow, leaning back in the boat.

Nick gave no further explanation than to ask in a minute, "Have you people to dinner to-night?"

"I believe there are three or four, but I'll put them off if you like."

"Must you *always* live in public, Julia?" Nick continued.

She looked at him a moment, and he could see that she colored slightly. "We'll go home — I'll put them off."

"Ah no, don't go home; it's too jolly here. Let them come — let them come, poor wretches!"

"How little you know me, when, ever so many times, I have lived here for months without a creature!"

"Except Mrs. Gresham, I suppose."

"I have had to have the house going, I admit."

"You're perfect, you're admirable, and I don't criticise you."

"I don't understand you!" she tossed back.

"That only adds to the generosity of what you have done for me," Nick returned, beginning to pull faster. He bent over the oars and sent the boat forward, keeping this up for ten minutes, during which they both remained silent. His companion, in her place, motionless, reclining (the seat in the stern was very comfortable), looked only at the water, the sky, the trees. At last Nick headed for the little temple, saying first, however, "Sha'n't we visit the ruin?"

"If you like. I don't mind seeing how they keep it."

They reached the white steps which led up to it. Nick held the boat, and Mrs. Dallow got out.

He fastened the boat, and they went up the steps together, passing through the open door.

"They keep it very well," Nick said, looking round. "It's a capital place to give up everything."

"It might do for you to explain what you mean," said Julia, sitting down.

"I mean to pretend for half an hour that I don't represent the burgesses of Harsh. It's charming — it's very delicate work. Surely it has been retouched."

The interior of the pavilion, lighted by windows which the circle of columns was supposed, outside and at a distance, to conceal, had a vaulted ceiling and was occupied by a few pieces of last-century furniture, spare and faded, of which the colors matched with the decoration of the walls. These and the ceiling, tinted and not exempt from indications of damp, were covered with fine mouldings and medallions. It was a very elegant little teahouse.

Mrs. Dallow sat on the edge of a sofa, rolling her parasol and remarking, "You ought to read Mr. Hoppus's article to me."

"Why, is *this* your salon?" asked Nick, smiling.

"Why are you always talking of that? It's an invention of your own."

"But is n't it the idea you care most about?"

Suddenly, nervously, Mrs. Dallow put up her parasol and sat under it, as if she were not quite

sensible of what she was doing. "How much you know me! I don't care about anything — that you will ever guess."

Nick Dormer wandered about the room, looking at various things it contained — the odd volumes on the tables, the bits of quaint china on the shelves. "They keep it very well; you've got charming things."

"They're supposed to come over every day and look after them."

"They must come over in force."

"Oh, no one knows."

"It's spick and span. How well you have everything done!"

"I think you've some reason to say so," said Mrs. Dallow. Her parasol was down, and she was again rolling it tight.

"But you're right about my not knowing you. Why were you so ready to do so much for me?"

He stopped in front of her and she looked up at him. Her eyes rested on his a minute; then she broke out, "Why do you hate me so?"

"Was it because you like me personally?" Nick asked. "You may think that an odd, or even an odious question; but isn't it natural, my wanting to know?"

"Oh, if you don't know!" Mrs. Dallow exclaimed.

"It's a question of being sure."

"Well, then, if you're not sure —"

"Was it done for me as a friend, as a man?"

"You're not a man ; you're a child," said his hostess, with a face that was cold, though she had been smiling the moment before.

"After all, I was a good candidate," Nick went on.

"What do I care for candidates?"

"You're the most delightful woman, Julia," said Nick, sitting down beside her, "and I can't imagine what you mean by my hating you."

"If you have n't discovered that I like you, you might as well."

"Might as well discover it?"

Mrs. Dallow was grave ; he had never seen her so pale and never so beautiful. She had stopped rolling her parasol now ; her hands were folded in her lap and her eyes were bent on them. Nick sat looking at them, too, a trifle awkwardly. "Might as well have hated me," said Mrs. Dallow.

"We have got on so beautifully together, all these days : why should n't we get on as well forever and ever?" Mrs. Dallow made no answer, and suddenly Nick said to her : "Ah, Julia, I don't know what you have done to me, but you've done it. You've done it by strange ways, but it will serve. Yes, I hate you," he added, in a different tone, with his face nearer to hers.

"Dear Nick — dear Nick" — she began. But she stopped, for she suddenly felt that he was altogether nearer, nearer than he had ever been to her before, that his arm was round her, that he was in possession of her. She closed her eyes,

but she heard him ask : "Why should n't it be forever, forever?" in a voice that had, for her ear, such a vibration as no voice had ever had.

"You've done it — you've done it," Nick repeated.

"What do you want of me?" she demanded.

"To stay with me, this way, always."

"Ah, not this way," she answered, softly, but as if in pain, and making an effort, with a certain force, to detach herself.

"This way, then — or this!" He took such insistent advantage of her that he had quickly kissed her. She rose as quickly, but he held her yet, and while he did so he said to her in the same tender tone, "If you'll marry me, why should n't it be so simple, so good?" He drew her closer again, too close for her to answer. But her struggle ceased and she rested upon him for a minute; she buried her face on his breast.

"You're hard, and it's cruel!" she then exclaimed, breaking away.

"Hard — cruel?"

"You do it with so little!" And with this, unexpectedly to Nick, Mrs. Dallow burst straight into tears. Before he could stop her she was at the door of the pavilion, as if she wished to quit it immediately. There, however, he stopped her, bending over her while she sobbed, unspeakably gentle with her.

"So little? It's with everything — with everything I have."

"I have done it, you say? What do you accuse me of doing?" Her tears were already over.

"Of making me yours; of being so precious, Julia, so exactly what a man wants, as it seems to me. I did n't know you could," he went on, smiling down at her. "I did n't — no, I did n't."

"It's what I say — that you've always hated me."

"I'll make it up to you."

She leaned on the doorway with her head against the lintel. "You don't even deny it."

"Contradict you *now*? I'll admit it, though it's rubbish, on purpose to live it down."

"It does n't matter," she said, slowly; "for however much you might have liked me, you would never have done so half as much as I have cared for you."

"Oh, I'm so poor!" Nick murmured, cheerfully.

She looked at him, smiling, and slowly shook her head. Then she declared, "You never can."

"I like that! Have n't I asked you to marry me? When did you ever ask me?"

"Every day of my life! As I say, it's hard — for a proud woman."

"Yes, you're too proud even to answer me."

"We must think of it, we must talk of it."

"Think of it? I've thought of it, ever so much."

"I mean together. There are things to be said."

"The principal thing is to give me your word."

Mrs. Dallow looked at him in silence ; then she exclaimed, "I wish I did n't adore you !" She went straight down the steps.

"You don't, if you leave me now. Why do you go? It's so charming here, and we are so delightfully alone."

"Detach the boat ; we'll go on the water," said Mrs. Dallow.

Nick was at the top of the steps, looking down at her. "Ah, stay a little — *do* stay !" he pleaded.

"I'll get in myself, I'll put off," she answered.

At this Nick came down, and he bent a little to undo the rope. He was close to her, and as he raised his head he felt it caught ; she had seized it in her hands, and she pressed her lips to the first place they encountered. The next instant she was in the boat.

This time he dipped the oars very slowly indeed ; and while, for a period that was longer than it seemed to them, they floated vaguely, they mainly sat and glowed at each other, as if everything had been settled. There were reasons enough why Nick should be happy ; but it is a singular fact that the leading one was the sense of having escaped from a great mistake. The final result of his mother's appeal to him the day

before had been the idea that he must act with unimpeachable honor. He was capable of taking it as an assurance that Julia had placed him under an obligation which a gentleman could regard only in one way. If *she* had understood it so, putting the vision, or at any rate the appreciation, of a closer tie into everything she had done for him, the case was conspicuously simple and his course unmistakably plain. That is why he had been gay when he came out of the house to look for her : he could be gay when his course was plain. He could be all the gayer, naturally, I must add, that in turning things over, as he had done half the night, what he had turned up oftenest was the recognition that Julia now had a new personal power over him. It was not for nothing that she had thrown herself personally into his life. She had by her act made him live twice as much, and such a service, if a man had accepted and deeply tasted it, was certainly a thing to put him on his honor. Nick gladly recognized that there was nothing he could do in preference that would not be spoiled for him by any deflection from that point. His mother had made him uncomfortable by intimating to him that Julia was in love with him (he did n't like, in general, to be told such things) ; but the responsibility seemed easier to carry, and he was less shy about it, when once he was away from other eyes, with only Julia's own to express that truth and with indifferent nature all around. Besides, what dis-

covery had he made this morning but that he also was in love?

"You must be a very great man," she said to him, in the middle of the lake. "I don't know what you mean, about my salon; but I *am* ambitious."

"We must look at life in a large, bold way," Nick replied, resting his oars.

"That's what I mean. If I did n't think you could I would n't look at you."

"I could what?"

"Do everything you ought—everything I imagine, I dream of. You *are* clever: you can never make me believe the contrary, after your speech on Tuesday. Don't speak to me! I've seen, I've heard, and I know what's in you. I shall hold you to it. You are everything that you pretend not to be."

Nick sat looking at the water while she talked. "Will it always be so amusing?" he asked.

"Will what always be?"

"Why, my career."

"Sha'n't I make it so?"

"It will be yours; it won't be mine," said Nick.

"Ah, don't say that: don't make me out that sort of woman! If they should say it's me, I'd drown myself."

"If they should say what's you?"

"Why, your getting on. If they should say I push you, that I do things for you."

"Well, won't you do them? It's just what I count on."

"Don't be dreadful," said Mrs. Dallow. "It would be loathsome if I were said to be cleverer than you. That's not the sort of man I want to marry."

"Oh, I shall make you work, my dear!"

"Ah, that!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, in a tone that might come back to a man in after years.

"You will do the great thing, you will make my life delightful," Nick declared, as if he fully perceived the sweetness of it. "I dare say that will keep me in heart."

"In heart? Why should n't you be in heart?" Julia's eyes, lingering on him, searching him, seemed to question him still more than her lips.

"Oh, it will be all right!" cried Nick.

"You'll like success, as well as any one else. Don't tell me — you're not so ethereal!"

"Yes, I shall like success."

"So shall I! And of course I am glad that you'll be able to do things," Mrs. Dallow went on. "I'm glad you'll have things. I'm glad I'm not poor."

"Ah, don't speak of that," Nick murmured. "Only be nice to my mother; we shall make her supremely happy."

"I'm glad I like your people," Mrs. Dallow dropped. "Leave them to me!"

"You're generous — you're noble," stammered Nick.

"Your mother must live at Broadwood; she must have it for life. It's not at all bad."

"Ah, Julia," her companion replied, "it's well I love you!"

"Why should n't you?" laughed Julia; and after this there was nothing said between them till the boat touched the shore. When she had got out Mrs. Dallow remarked that it was time for luncheon; but they took no action in consequence, strolling in a direction which was not that of the house. There was a vista that drew them on, a grassy path skirting the foundations of scattered beeches and leading to a stile from which the charmed wanderer might drop into another division of Mrs. Dallow's property. This lady said something about their going as far as the stile; then, the next instant, she exclaimed, "How stupid of you — you've forgotten Mr. Hoppus!"

"We left him in the temple of Vesta. Darling, I had other things to think of there."

"I'll send for him," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Lord, can you think of him now?" Nick asked.

"Of course I can — more than ever."

"Shall we go back for him?" Nick inquired, pausing.

Mrs. Dallow made no answer; she continued to walk, saying they would go as far as the stile. "Of course I know you're fearfully vague," she presently resumed.

"I was n't vague at all. But you were in such a hurry to get away."

"It does n't signify. I have another one at home."

"Another summer-house?" suggested Nick.

"A copy of Mr. Hoppus."

"Mercy, how you go in for him! Fancy having two!"

"He sent me the number of the magazine; and the other is the one that comes every month."

"Every month — I see," said Nick, in a manner justifying considerably Mrs. Dallow's charge of vagueness. They had reached the stile and he leaned over it, looking at a great mild meadow and at the browsing beasts in the distance.

"Did you suppose they come every day?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear, no, thank God!" They remained there a little; he continued to look at the animals, and before long he added: "Delightful English pastoral scene. Why do they say it won't paint?"

"Who says it won't?"

"I don't know—some of them. It will in France; but somehow it won't here."

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Dallow demanded.

Nick appeared unable to satisfy her on this point; at any rate, instead of answering her directly he said: "Is Broadwood very charming?"

"Have you never been there? It shows how you've treated me. We used to go there in August. George had ideas about it," added Mrs. Dallow. She had never affected not to speak of her late husband, especially with Nick, whose kinsman, in a manner, he had been and who had liked him better than some others did.

"George had ideas about a great many things."

Julia Dallow appeared to be conscious that it would be rather odd, on such an occasion, to take this up. It was even odd in Nick to have said it. "Broadwood is just right," she rejoined at last. "It's neither too small nor too big, and it takes care of itself. There's nothing to be done: you can't spend a penny."

"And don't you want to use it?"

"We can go and stay with *them*," said Mrs. Dallow.

"They'll think I bring them an angel." And Nick covered her hand, which was resting on the stile, with his own large one.

"As they regard you yourself as an angel they will take it as natural of you to associate with your kind."

"Oh, *my* kind!" murmured Nick, looking at the cows.

Mrs. Dallow turned away from him, as if she were starting homeward, and he began to retrace his steps with her. Suddenly she said: "What did you mean, that night in Paris?"

"That night?"

"When you came to the hotel with me, after we had all dined at that place with Peter."

"What did I mean?"

"About your caring so much for the fine arts. You seemed to want to frighten me."

"Why should you have been frightened? I can't imagine what I had in my head: not now."

"You *are* vague," said Julia, with a little flush.

"Not about the great thing."

"The great thing?"

"That I owe you everything an honest man has to offer. How can I care about the fine arts now?"

Mrs. Dallow stopped, looking at him. "Is it because you think you *owe* it —" and she paused, still with the heightened color in her cheek; then she went on — "that you have spoken to me as you did there?" She tossed her head toward the lake.

"I think I spoke to you because I couldn't help it."

"You *are* vague!" And Mrs. Dallow walked on again.

"You affect me differently from any other woman."

"Oh, other women! Why should n't you care about the fine arts now?" she added.

"There will be no time. All my days and my years will be none too much to do what you expect of me."

"I don't expect you to give up anything. I only expect you to do more."

"To do more I must do less. I have no talent."

"No talent?"

"I mean for painting."

Mrs. Dallow stopped again. "That's odious! You *have* — you must."

Nick burst out laughing. "You're altogether delightful. But how little you know about it — about the honorable practice of any art!"

"What do you call practice? You'll have all our things — you'll live in the midst of them."

"Certainly I shall enjoy looking at them, being so near them."

"Don't say I've taken you away then."

"Taken me away?"

"From the love of art. I like them myself now, poor George's treasures. I didn't, of old, so much, because it seemed to me he made too much of them — he was always talking."

"Well, I won't talk," said Nick.

"You may do as you like — they're yours."

"Give them to the nation," Nick went on.

"I like that! When we have done with them."

"We shall have done with them when your Vandykes and Moronis have cured me of the delusion that I may be of *their* family. Surely that won't take long."

"You shall paint *me*," said Julia.

"Never, never, never!" Nick uttered these words in a tone that made his companion stare; and he appeared slightly embarrassed at this result of his emphasis. To relieve himself he said, as they had come back to the place beside the lake where the boat was moored, "Sha'n't we really go and fetch Mr. Hoppus?"

She hesitated. "You may go; I won't, please."

"That's not what I want."

"Oblige me by going. I'll wait here." With which Mrs. Dallow sat down on the bench attached to the little landing.

Nick, at this, got into the boat and put off; he smiled at her as she sat there watching him. He made his short journey, disembarked and went into the pavilion; but when he came out with the object of his errand he saw that Mrs. Dallow had quitted her station—she had returned to the house without him. He rowed back quickly, sprang ashore and followed her with long steps. Apparently she had gone fast; she had almost reached the door when he overtook her.

"Why did you basely desert me?" he asked, stopping her there.

"I don't know. Because I'm so happy."

"May I tell mother?"

"You may tell her she shall have Broadwood."

XVI.

NICK lost no time in going down to see Mr. Carteret, to whom he had written immediately after the election and who had answered him in twelve revised pages of historical parallel. He used often to envy Mr. Carteret's leisure, a sense of which came to him now afresh, in the summer evening, as he walked up the hill toward the quiet house where enjoyment, for him, had ever been mingled with a vague oppression. He was a little boy again, under Mr. Carteret's roof — a little boy on whom it had been duly impressed that in the wide, plain, peaceful rooms he was not to "touch." When he paid a visit to his father's old friend there were in fact many things — many topics — from which he instinctively kept his hands. Even Mr. Chayter, the immemorial blank butler, who was so like his master that he might have been a twin brother, helped to remind him that he must be good. Mr. Carteret seemed to Nick a very grave person, but he had the sense that Chayter thought him rather frivolous.

Our young man always came on foot from the station, leaving his portmanteau to be carried: the direct way was steep and he liked the slow

approach, which gave him a chance to look about the place and smell the new-mown hay. At this season the air was full of it — the fields were so near that it was in the small, empty streets. Nick would never have thought of rattling up to Mr. Carteret's door. It had an old brass plate, with his name, as if he had been the principal surgeon. The house was in the high part, and the neat roofs of other houses, lower down the hill, made an immediate prospect for it, scarcely counting, however, for the green country was just below these, familiar and interpenetrating, in the shape of small but thick-tufted gardens. There was something growing in all the intervals, and the only disorder of the place was that there were sometimes oats on the pavements. A crooked lane, very clean, with cobblestones, opened opposite to Mr. Carteret's house and wandered towards the old abbey; for the abbey was the secondary fact of Beauclere, after Mr. Carteret. Mr. Carteret sometimes went away and the abbey never did; yet somehow it was most of the essence of the place that it possessed the proprietor of the squarest of the square red houses, with the finest of the arched hall-windows, in three divisions, over the widest of the last-century doorways. You saw the great abbey from the doorstep, beyond the gardens of course, and in the stillness you could hear the flutter of the birds that circled round its huge, short towers. The towers had never been finished, save as time finishes things,

by perpetuating their incompleteness. There is something right in old monuments that have been wrong for centuries: some such moral as that was usually in Nick's mind, as an emanation of Beauclere, when he looked at the magnificent line of the roof riding the sky and unsurpassed for length.

When the door with the brass plate was opened and Mr. Chayter appeared in the middle distance (he always advanced just to the same spot, like a prime minister receiving an ambassador), Nick saw anew that he would be wonderfully like Mr. Carteret if he had had an expression. He did not permit himself this freedom; never giving a sign of recognition, often as the young man had been at the house. He was most attentive to the visitor's wants, but apparently feared that if he allowed a familiarity it might go too far. There was always the same question to be asked — had Mr. Carteret finished his nap? He usually had not finished it, and this left Nick what he liked — time to smoke a cigarette in the garden, or even, before dinner, to take a turn about the place. He observed now, every time he came, that Mr. Carteret's nap lasted a little longer. There was, each year, a little more strength to be gathered for the ceremony of dinner: this was the principal symptom — almost the only one — that the clear-cheeked old gentleman gave of not being so fresh as of yore. He was still wonderful for his age. To-day he was

particularly careful: Chayter went so far as to mention to Nick that four gentlemen were expected to dinner — an effusiveness perhaps partly explained by the circumstance that Lord Bottomley was one of them.

The prospect of Lord Bottomley was, somehow, not stirring; it only made the young man say to himself with a quick, thin sigh, “This time *I am* in for it!” And he immediately had the unpolitical sense again that there was nothing so pleasant as the way the quiet bachelor house had its best rooms on the big garden, which seemed to advance into them through their wide windows and ruralize their dullness.

“I expect it will be a lateish eight, sir,” said Mr. Chayter, superintending, in the library, the production of tea on a large scale. Everything at Mr. Carteret’s appeared to Nick to be on a larger scale than anywhere else — the tea-cups, the knives and forks, the door-handles, the chair-backs, the legs of mutton, the candles and the lumps of coal: they represented, and apparently exhausted, the master’s sense of pleasing effect, for the house was not otherwise decorated. Nick thought it really hideous, but he was capable at the same time of extracting a degree of amusement from anything that was strongly characteristic, and Mr. Carteret’s interior expressed a whole view of life. Our young man was generous enough to find a hundred instructive intimations in it even at the time it came over him (as

it always did at Beauclere) that this was the view he himself was expected to take. Nowhere were the boiled eggs, at breakfast, so big or in such big receptacles ; his own shoes, arranged in his room, looked to him vaster there than at home. He went out into the garden and remembered what enormous strawberries they should have for dinner. In the house there was a great deal of Landseer, of oilcloth, of woodwork painted and "grained."

Finding that he should have time before the evening meal, or before Mr. Carteret would be able to see him, he quitted the house and took a stroll toward the abbey. It covered acres of ground, on the summit of the hill, and there were aspects in which its vast bulk reminded him of the ark left high and dry upon Ararat. At least it was the image of a great wreck, of the indestructible vessel of a faith, washed up there by a storm centuries before. The injury of time added to this appearance — the infirmities around which, as he knew, the battle of restoration had begun to be fought. The cry had been raised to save the splendid pile, and the counter-cry by the purists, the sentimentalists, whatever they were, to save it from being saved. They were all exchanging compliments in the morning papers.

Nick sauntered round the church — it took a good while ; he leaned against low things and looked up at it while he smoked another cigarette.

It struck him as a great pity it should be touched : so much of the past was buried there that it was like desecrating, like digging up a grave. And the years seemed to be letting it down so gently : why jostle the elbow of slow-fingering time ? The fading afternoon was exquisitely pure ; the place was empty ; he heard nothing but the cries of several children, which sounded sweet, who were playing on the flatness of the very old tombs. He knew that this would inevitably be one of the topics at dinner, the restoration of the abbey ; it would give rise to a considerable deal of orderly debate. Lord Bottomley, oddly enough, would probably oppose the expensive project, but on grounds that would be characteristic of him even if the attitude were not. Nick's nerves, on this spot, always knew what it was to be soothed ; but he shifted his position with a slight impatience as the vision came over him of Lord Bottomley's treating a question of æsthetics. It was enough to make one want to take the other side, the idea of having the same taste as his lordship : one would have it for such different reasons.

Dear Mr. Carteret would be deliberate and fair all round, and would, like his noble friend, exhibit much more architectural knowledge than he, Nick, possessed : which would not make it a whit less droll to our young man that an artistic idea, so little really assimilated, should be broached at that table and in that air. It would remain so outside of their minds, and their minds would remain so

outside of it. It would be dropped at last, however, after half an hour's gentle worrying, and the conversation would incline itself to public affairs. Mr. Carteret would find his natural level — the production of anecdote in regard to the formation of early ministries. He knew more than any one else about the personages of whom certain cabinets would have consisted if they had not consisted of others. His favorite exercise was to illustrate how different everything might have been from what it was, and how the reason of the difference had always been somebody's inability to "see his way" to accept the view of somebody else — a view usually, at the time, discussed, in strict confidence, with Mr. Carteret, who surrounded his actual violation of that confidence, thirty years later, with many precautions against scandal. In this retrospective vein, at the head of his table, the old gentleman always enjoyed an audience, or at any rate commanded a silence, often profound. Every one left it to some one else to ask another question; and when by chance some one else did so every one was struck with admiration at any one's being able to say anything. Nick knew the moment when he himself would take a glass of a particular port and, surreptitiously looking at his watch, perceive it was ten o'clock. It might as well be 1830.

All this would be a part of the suggestion of leisure that invariably descended upon him at Beauclere — the image of a sloping shore where

the tide of time broke with a ripple too faint to be a warning. But there was another admonition that was almost equally sure to descend upon his spirit in a summer hour, in a stroll about the grand abbey; to sink into it as the light lingered on the rough red walls and the local accent of the children sounded soft in the churchyard. It was simply the sense of England — a sort of apprehended revelation of his country. The dim annals of the place appeared to be in the air (foundations bafflingly early, a great monastic life, wars of the Roses, with battles and blood in the streets, and then the long quietude of the respectable centuries, all corn-fields and magistrates and vicars), and these things were connected with an emotion that arose from the green country, the rich land so infinitely lived in, and laid on him a hand that was too ghostly to press and yet, somehow, too urgent to be light. It produced a throb that he could not have spoken of, it was so deep, and that was half imagination and half responsibility. These impressions melted together and made a general appeal, of which, with his new honors as a legislator, he was the sentient subject. If he had a love for this particular scene of life, might it not have a love for him and expect something of him? What fate could be so high as to grow old in a national affection? What a grand kind of reciprocity, making mere soreness of all the balms of indifference!

The great church was still open, and he turned

into it and wandered a little in the twilight, which had gathered earlier there. The whole structure, with its immensity of height and distance, seemed to rest on tremendous facts — facts of achievement and endurance — and the huge Norman pillars to loom through the dimness like the ghosts of heroes. Nick was more struck with its human than with its divine significance, and he felt the oppression of his conscience as he walked slowly about. It was in his mind that nothing in life was really clear, all things were mingled and charged, and that patriotism might be an uplifting passion even if it had to allow for Lord Bottomley and for Mr. Carteret's blindness on certain sides. Presently he perceived it was nearly half past seven, and as he went back to his old friend's he could not have told you whether he was in a state of gladness or of gloom.

"Mr. Carteret will be in the drawing-room at a quarter to eight, sir," Chayter said; and Nick, as he went to his chamber, asked himself what was the use of being a member of Parliament if one was still sensitive to an intimation on the part of such a functionary that one ought already to have begun to dress. Chayter's words meant that Mr. Carteret would expect to have a little comfortable conversation with him before dinner. Nick's usual rapidity in dressing was, however, quite adequate to the occasion, and his host had not appeared when he went down. There were flowers in the unfeminine saloon, which contained

several paintings, in addition to the engravings of pictures of animals ; but nothing could prevent its reminding Nick of a comfortable committee-room.

Mr. Carteret presently came in, with his gold-headed stick, a laugh like a series of little warning coughs and the air of embarrassment that our young man always perceived in him at first. He was nearly eighty, but he was still shy — he laughed a great deal, faintly and vaguely, at nothing, as if to make up for the seriousness with which he took some jokes. He always began by looking away from his interlocutor, and it was only little by little that his eyes came round ; after which their limpid and benevolent blue made you wonder why they should ever be circumspect. He was clean shaven and had a long upper lip. When he had seated himself he talked of “majorities,” and showed a disposition to converse on the general subject of the fluctuation of Liberal gains. He had an extraordinary memory for facts of this sort, and could mention the figures relating to elections in innumerable places in particular years. To many of these facts he attached great importance, in his simple, kindly, presupposing way ; returning five minutes later and correcting himself if he had said that some one, in 1857, had had 6014 instead of 6004.

Nick always felt a great hypocrite as he listened to him, in spite of the old man’s courtesy — a thing so charming in itself that it would have

been grossness to speak of him as a bore. The difficulty was that he took for granted all kinds of positive assent, and Nick, in his company, found himself immersed in an atmosphere of tacit pledges which constituted the very medium of intercourse and yet made him draw his breath a little in pain when, for a moment, he measured them. There would have been no hypocrisy at all if he could have regarded Mr. Carteret as a mere sweet spectacle, the last, or almost the last, illustration of a departing tradition of manners. But he represented something more than manners ; he represented what he believed to be morals and ideas — ideas as regards which he took your personal deference (not discovering how natural that was) for participation. Nick liked to think that his father, though ten years younger, had found it congruous to make his best friend of the owner of so nice a nature : it gave a softness to his feeling for that memory to be reminded that Sir Nicholas had been of the same general type — a type so pure, so disinterested, so anxious about the public good. Just so it endeared Mr. Carteret to him to perceive that he considered his father had done a definite work, prematurely interrupted, which had been an absolute benefit to the people of England. The oddity was, however, that though both Mr. Carteret's aspect and his appreciation were still so fresh, this relation of his to his late distinguished friend made the latter appear to Nick even more

irrecoverably dead. The good old man had almost a vocabulary of his own, made up of old-fashioned political phrases and quite untainted with the new terms, mostly borrowed from America; indeed, his language and his tone made those of almost any one who might be talking with him appear by contrast rather American. He was, at least nowadays, never severe nor denunciatory; but sometimes, in telling an anecdote, he dropped such an expression as "the rascal said to me," or such an epithet as "the vulgar dog."

Nick was always struck with the rare simplicity (it came out in his countenance) of one who had lived so long and seen so much of affairs that draw forth the passions and perversities of men. It often made him say to himself that Mr. Carteret must have been very remarkable to achieve with his means so many things requiring cleverness. It was as if experience, though coming to him in abundance, had dealt with him with such clean hands as to leave no stain, and had never provoked him to any general reflection. He had never proceeded in any ironic way from the particular to the general; certainly he had never made a reflection upon anything so unparliamentary as Life. He would have questioned the taste of such an obtrusion, and if he had encountered it on the part of another would have regarded it as a kind of French toy, with the uses of which he was unacquainted. Life, for

him, was a purely practical function, not a question of phrasing. It must be added that he had, to Nick's perception, his variations — his back windows opening into grounds more private. That was visible from the way his eye grew cold and his whole polite face rather austere when he listened to something that he did n't agree with or perhaps even understand; as if his modesty did not in strictness forbid the suspicion that a thing he did n't understand would have a probability against it. At such times there was something a little deadly in the silence in which he simply waited, with a lapse in his face, without helping his interlocutor out. Nick would have been very sorry to attempt to communicate to him a matter which he probably would not understand. This cut off, of course, a multitude of subjects.

The evening passed exactly as Nick had foreseen, even to the rather early dispersal of the guests, two of whom were "local" men, earnest and distinct, though not particularly distinguished. The third was a young, slim, uninitiated gentleman whom Lord Bottomley brought with him and concerning whom Nick was informed beforehand that he was engaged to be married to the Honorable Jane, his lordship's second daughter. There were recurrent allusions to Nick's victory, as to which he had the fear that he might appear to exhibit less interest in it than the company did. He took energetic

precautions against this and felt, repeatedly, a little spent with them, for the subject always came up once more. Yet it was not as his but as theirs that they liked the triumph. Mr. Carteret took leave of him for the night directly after the other guests had gone, using at this moment the words that he had often used before :

“ You may sit up to any hour you like. I only ask that you don't read in bed.”

XVII.

NICK's little visit was to terminate immediately after luncheon the following day : much as the old man enjoyed his being there he would not have dreamed of asking for more of his time, now that it had such great public uses. He liked infinitely better that his young friend should be occupied with parliamentary work than only occupied in talking about it with him. Talk about it, however, was the next best thing, as, on the morrow, after breakfast, Mr. Carteret showed Nick that he considered. They sat in the garden, the morning being warm, and the old man had a table beside him, covered with the letters and newspapers that the post had brought. He was proud of his correspondence, which was altogether on public affairs, and proud, in a manner, of the fact that he now dictated almost everything. That had more in it of the statesman in retirement, a character indeed not consciously assumed by Mr. Carteret, but always tacitly attributed to him by Nick, who took it rather from the pictorial point of view : remembering, on each occasion, only afterwards that though he was in retirement he had not exactly been a statesman. A young man, a very sharp, handy young man, came every morning

at ten o'clock and wrote for him till lunch-time. The young man had a holiday to-day, in honor of Nick's visit — a fact the mention of which led Nick to make some not particularly sincere speech about *his* being ready to write anything if Mr. Carteret were at all pressed.

"Ah, but your own budget : what will become of that ?" the old gentleman objected, glancing at Nick's pockets as if he was rather surprised not to see them stuffed out with documents in split envelopes. His visitor had to confess that he had not directed his letters to meet him at Beaulclere : he should find them in town that afternoon. This led to a little homily from Mr. Carteret which made him feel rather guilty ; there was such an implication of neglected duty in the way the old man said, "You won't do them justice — you won't do them justice." He talked for ten minutes, in his rich, simple, urbane way, about the fatal consequences of getting behind. It was his favorite doctrine that one should always be a little before ; and his own eminently regular respiration seemed to illustrate the idea. A man was certainly before who had so much in his rear.

This led to the bestowal of a good deal of general advice as to the mistakes to avoid at the beginning of a parliamentary career ; as to which Mr. Carteret spoke with the experience of one who had sat for fifty years in the House of Commons. Nick was amused, but also mystified and even a little irritated, by his talk : it was founded

on the idea of observation, and yet Nick was unable to regard Mr. Carteret as an observer. "He does n't observe *me*," he said to himself; "if he did he would see, he would n't think —" And the end of this private cogitation was a vague impatience of all the things his venerable host took for granted. He did n't see any of the things that Nick saw. Some of these latter were the light touches that the summer morning scattered through the sweet old garden. The time passed there a good deal as if it were sitting still, with a plaid under its feet, while Mr. Carteret distilled a little more of the wisdom that he had drawn from his fifty years. This immense term had something fabulous and monstrous for Nick, who wondered whether it were the sort of thing his companion supposed *he* had gone in for. It was not strange Mr. Carteret should be different; he might originally have been more — to himself Nick was not obliged to phrase it: what our young man meant was, more of what it was perceptible to him that his host was not. Should even he, Nick, be like that at the end of fifty years? What Mr. Carteret was so good as to expect for him was that he should be much more distinguished; and would n't this exactly mean much more like that? Of course Nick heard some things that he had heard before; as for instance the circumstances that had originally led the old man to settle at Beauclere. He had been returned for that locality (it was his second seat),

in years far remote, and had come to live there because he then had a conscientious conviction (modified indeed by later experience) that a member should be constantly resident. He spoke of this now, smiling rosily, as he might have spoken of some wild aberration of his youth; yet he called Nick's attention to the fact that he still so far clung to his conviction as to hold (though of what might be urged on the other side he was perfectly aware) that a representative should at least be as resident as possible. This gave Nick an opening for saying something that had been on and off his lips all the morning.

"According to that I ought to take up my abode at Harsh."

"In the measure of the convenient I should not be sorry to see you do it."

"It ought to be rather convenient," Nick replied, smiling. "I've got a piece of news for you which I've kept, as one keeps that sort of thing (for it's very good), till the last." He waited a little, to see if Mr. Carteret would guess, and at first he thought nothing would come of this. But after resting his young-looking eyes on him for a moment the old man said —

"I should indeed be very happy to hear that you have arranged to take a wife."

"Mrs. Dallow has been so good as to say that she will marry me," Nick went on.

"That's very suitable. I should think it would answer."

"It's very jolly," said Nick. It was well that Mr. Carteret was not what his guest called observant, or he might have thought there was less gayety in the sound of this sentence than in the sense.

"Your dear father would have liked it."

"So my mother says."

"And *she* must be delighted."

"Mrs. Dallow, do you mean?" Nick asked.

"I was thinking of your mother. But I don't exclude the charming lady. I remember her as a little girl. I must have seen her at Windrush. Now I understand the zeal and amiability with which she threw herself into your canvass."

"It was her they elected," said Nick.

"I don't know that I have ever been an enthusiast for political women, but there is no doubt that, in approaching the mass of electors, a graceful, affable manner, the manner of the real English lady, is a force not to be despised."

"Mrs. Dallow is a real English lady, and at the same time she's a very political woman," Nick remarked.

"Is n't it rather in the family? I remember once going to see her mother in town and finding the leaders of both parties sitting with her."

"My principal friend, of the others, is her brother Peter. I don't think he troubles himself much about that sort of thing."

"What does he trouble himself about?" Mr. Carteret inquired, with a certain gravity.

"He's in the diplomatic service ; he's a secretary in Paris."

"That may be serious," said the old man.

"He takes a great interest in the theatre ; I suppose you'll say that may be serious too," Nick added, laughing.

"Oh !" exclaimed Mr. Carteret, looking as if he scarcely understood. Then he continued, "Well, it can't hurt you."

"It can't hurt me ?"

"If Mrs. Dallow takes an interest in your interests."

"When a man's in my situation he feels as if nothing could hurt him."

"I'm very glad you're happy," said Mr. Carteret. He rested his mild eyes on our young man, who had a sense of seeing in them, for a moment, the faint ghost of an old story, the dim revival of a sentiment that had become the memory of a memory. This glimmer of wonder and envy, the revelation of a life intensely celibate, was for an instant infinitely touching. Nick had always had a theory, suggested by a vague allusion from his father, who had been discreet, that their benevolent friend had had, in his youth, an unhappy love-affair which had led him to forswear forever the commerce of woman. What remained in him of conscious renunciation gave a throb as he looked at his bright companion, who proposed to take the matter so much the other way. "It's good to marry, and I think it's right."

I've not done right, I know it. If she's a good woman it's the best thing," Mr. Carteret went on. "It's what I've been hoping for you. Sometimes I've thought of speaking to you."

"She's a very good woman," said Nick.

"And I hope she's not poor." Mr. Carteret spoke with exactly the same blandness.

"No, indeed, she's rich. Her husband, whom I knew and liked, left her a large fortune."

"And on what terms does she enjoy it?"

"I have n't the least idea," said Nick.

Mr. Carteret was silent a moment. "I see. It doesn't concern you. It need n't concern you," he added in a moment.

Nick thought of his mother, at this, but he remarked: "I dare say she can do what she likes with her money."

"So can I, my dear young friend," said Mr. Carteret.

Nick tried not to look conscious, for he felt a significance in the old man's face. He turned his own everywhere but towards it, thinking again of his mother. "That must be very pleasant, if one has any."

"I wish you had a little more."

"I don't particularly care," said Nick.

"Your marriage will assist you; you can't help that," Mr. Carteret went on. "But I should like you to be under obligations not quite so heavy."

"Oh, I'm so obliged to her for caring for me!"

"That the rest does n't count? Certainly it's nice of her to like you. But why should n't she? Other people do."

"Some of them make me feel as if I abused it," said Nick, looking at his host. "That is, they don't make me, but I feel it," he added, correcting himself.

"I have no son," said Mr. Carteret. "Sha'n't you be very kind to her?" he pursued. "You'll gratify her ambition."

"Oh, she thinks me cleverer than I am."

"That's because she's in love," hinted the old gentleman, as if this were very subtle. "However, you must be as clever as we think you. If you don't prove so —" And he paused, with his folded hands.

"Well, if I don't?" asked Nick.

"Oh, it won't do — it won't do," said Mr. Carteret, in a tone his companion was destined to remember afterwards. "I say I have no son," he continued; "but if I had had one he should have risen high."

"It's well for me such a person does n't exist. I should n't easily have found a wife."

"He should have gone to the altar with a little money in his pocket."

"That would have been the least of his advantages, sir."

"When are you to be married?" Mr. Carteret asked.

"Ah, that's the question. Mrs. Dallow won't say."

"Well, you may consider that when it comes off I will make you a settlement."

"I feel your kindness more than I can say," Nick replied; "but that will probably be the moment when I shall be least conscious of wanting anything."

"You'll appreciate it later — you'll appreciate it very soon. I shall like you to appreciate it," Mr. Carteret went on, as if he had a just vision of the way a young man of a proper spirit should feel. Then he added, "Your father would have liked you to appreciate it."

"Poor father!" Nick exclaimed vaguely, rather embarrassed, reflecting on the oddity of a position in which the ground for holding up his head as the husband of a rich woman would be that he had accepted a present of money from another source. It was plain that he was not fated to go in for independence; the most that he could treat himself to would be dependence that was duly grateful. "How much do you expect of me?" he pursued, with a grave face.

"It's only what your father did. He so often spoke of you, I remember, at the last, just after you had been with him alone — you know I saw him then. He was greatly moved by his interview with you, and so was I by what he told me of it. He said he should live on in you — he should work in you. It has always given me a very peculiar feeling, if I may use the expression, about you."

"The feelings are indeed peculiar, dear Mr. Carteret, which take so munificent a form. But you do — oh, you do — expect too much."

"I expect you to repay me!" said the old man gayly. "As for the form, I have it in my mind."

"The form of repayment?"

"No, no — of settlement."

"Ah, don't talk of it now," said Nick, "for, you see, nothing else is settled. No one has been told except my mother. She has only consented to my telling you."

"Lady Agnes, do you mean?"

"Ah, no; dear mother would like to publish it on the house-tops. She's so glad — she wants us to have it over to-morrow. But Julia wishes to wait. Therefore kindly mention it for the present to no one."

"My dear boy, at this rate there is nothing to mention. What does Julia want to wait for?"

"Till I like her better — that's what she says."

"It's the way to make you like her worse. Has n't she your affection?"

"So much so that her delay makes me exceedingly unhappy."

Mr. Carteret looked at his young friend as if he did n't strike him as very unhappy; but he demanded: "Then what more does she want?" Nick laughed out at this, but he perceived his host had not meant it as an epigram; while the

latter went on : " I don't understand. You're engaged or you're not engaged."

" She is, but I am not. That's what she says about it. The trouble is she does n't believe in me."

" Does n't she love you, then ?"

" That's what I ask her. Her answer is that she loves me only too well. She's so afraid of being a burden to me that she gives me my freedom till I've taken another year to think."

" I like the way you talk about other years !" Mr. Carteret exclaimed. " You had better do it while I'm here to bless you."

" She thinks I proposed to her because she got me in for Harsh," said Nick.

" Well, I'm sure it would be a very pretty return."

" Ah, she does n't believe in me," Nick murmured.

" Then I don't believe in her."

" Don't say that — don't say that. She's a very rare creature. But she's proud, shy, suspicious."

" Suspicious of what ?"

" Of everything. She thinks I'm not persistent."

" Persistent ?"

" She can't believe I shall arrive at true eminence."

" A good wife should believe what her husband believes," said Mr. Carteret.

"Ah, unfortunately I don't believe it, either."

Mr. Carteret looked serious. "Your dear father did."

"I think of that — I think of that," Nick replied. "Certainly it will help me. If I say we're engaged," he went on, "it's because I consider it so. She gives me my liberty, but I don't take it."

"Does she expect you to take back your word?"

"That's what I ask her. *She* never will. Therefore we're as good as tied."

"I don't like it," said Mr. Carteret, after a moment. "I don't like ambiguous, uncertain situations. They please me much better when they are definite and clear." The retreat of expression had been sounded in his face — the aspect it wore when he wished not to be encouraging. But after an instant he added, in a tone softer than this, "Don't disappoint me, my dear boy."

"Disappoint you?"

"I've told you what I want to do for you. See that the conditions come about promptly in which I *may* do it. Are you sure that you do everything to satisfy Mrs. Dallow?" Mr. Carteret continued.

"I think I'm very nice to her," Nick protested. "But she's so ambitious. Frankly speaking, it's a pity — for her — that she likes me."

"She can't help that."

"Possibly. But isn't it a reason for taking

me as I am? What she wants to do is to take me as I may be a year hence."

"I don't understand, if, as you say, even then she won't take back her word," said Mr. Carteret.

"If she does n't marry me I think she'll never marry again at all."

"What, then, does she gain by delay?"

"Simply this, as I make it out—that she'll feel she has been very magnanimous. She won't have to reproach herself with not having given me a chance to change."

"To change? What does she think you liable to do?"

Nick was silent a minute. "I don't know!" he said, not at all candidly.

"Everything has altered: young people in my day looked at these questions more naturally," Mr. Carteret declared. "A woman in love has no need to be magnanimous. If she is, she is n't in love," he added shrewdly.

"Oh, Mrs. Dallow's safe—she's safe," Nick smiled.

"If it were a question between you and another gentleman one might comprehend. But what does it mean, between you and nothing?"

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Nick returned. "The trouble is that she does n't know what she has got hold of."

"Ah, if you can't make it clear to her!"

"I'm such a humbug," said the young man.

His companion stared, and he continued : " I deceive people without in the least intending it."

" What on earth do you mean? Are you deceiving me?"

" I don't know ; it depends on what you think."

" I think you're flighty," said Mr. Carteret, with the nearest approach to sternness that Nick had ever observed in him. " I never thought so before."

" Forgive me ; it's all right. I'm not frivolous ; that I affirm I'm not."

" You *have* deceived me if you are."

" It's all right," Nick stammered, with a blush.

" Remember your name -- carry it high."

" I will -- as high as possible."

" You've no excuse. Don't tell me, after your speeches at Harsh!" Nick was on the point of declaring again that he was a humbug, so vivid was his inner sense of what *he* thought of his factitious public utterances, which had the cursed property of creating dreadful responsibilities and importunate credulities for him. If *he* was " clever," what fools many other people were! He repressed his impulse, and Mr. Carteret pursued : " If, as you express it, Mrs. Dallow does n't know what she has got hold of, won't it clear the matter up a little if you inform her that the day before your marriage is definitely settled to take place you will come into something comfortable?"

A quick vision of what Mr. Carteret would be likely to regard as something comfortable flitted

before Nick, but it did not prevent him from replying: "Oh, I'm afraid that won't do any good. It would make her like you better, but it would n't make her like me. I'm afraid she won't care for any benefit that comes to me from another hand than hers. Her affection is a very jealous sentiment."

"It's a very peculiar one!" sighed Mr. Carteret. "Mine's a jealous sentiment, too. However, if she takes it that way, don't tell her."

"I'll let you know as soon as she comes round," said Nick.

"And you'll tell your mother," said Mr. Carteret. "I shall like her to know."

"It will be delightful news to her. But she's keen enough already."

"I know that. I may mention now that she has written to me," the old man added.

"So I suspected."

"We have corresponded on the subject," Mr. Carteret continued to confess. "My view of the advantageous character of such an alliance has entirely coincided with hers."

"It was very good-natured of you to leave me to speak first," said Nick.

"I should have been disappointed if you had n't. I don't like all you have told me. But don't disappoint me now."

"Dear Mr. Carteret!" Nick exclaimed.

"I won't disappoint *you*," the old man went on, looking at his big, old-fashioned watch.

XVIII.

AT first Peter Sherringham thought of asking to be transferred to another post and went so far, in London, as to take what he believed to be good advice on the subject. The advice perhaps struck him as the better for consisting of a strong recommendation to do nothing so foolish. Two or three reasons were mentioned to him why such a request would not, in the particular circumstances, raise him in the esteem of his superiors, and he promptly recognized their force. It next appeared to him that it might help him (not with his superiors, but with himself) to apply for an extension of leave ; but on further reflection he remained convinced that though there are some dangers before which it is perfectly consistent with honor to flee, it was better for every one concerned that he should fight this especial battle on the spot. During his holiday his plan of campaign gave him plenty of occupation. He refurbished his arms, rubbed up his strategy, laid out his lines of defense.

There was only one thing in life that his mind had been very much made up to, but on this question he had never wavered: he would get on, to the utmost, in his profession. It was a

point on which it was perfectly lawful to be unamiable to others — to be vigilant, eager, suspicious, selfish. He had not, in fact, been unamiable to others, for his affairs had not required it : he had got on well enough without hardening his heart. Fortune had been kind to him, and he had passed so many competitors on the way that he could forswear jealousy and be generous. But he had always flattered himself that his hand would not falter on the day he should find it necessary to drop bitterness into his cup. This day would be sure to dawn, for no career was all clear water to the end ; and then the sacrifice would find him ready. His mind was familiar with the thought of a sacrifice : it is true that nothing could be plain in advance about the occasion, the object, the victim. All that was tolerably definite was that the propitiatory offering would have to be some cherished enjoyment. Very likely, indeed, this enjoyment would be associated with the charms of another person — a probability pregnant with the idea that such charms would have to be dashed out of sight. At any rate, it never had occurred to Sherringham that he himself might be the sacrifice. You had to pay, to get on ; but at least you borrowed from others to do it. When you could n't borrow you did n't get on : for what was the situation in life in which you met the whole requisition yourself ?

Least of all had it occurred to our friend that

the wrench might come through his interest in that branch of art on which Nick Dormer had rallied him. The beauty of a love of the theatre was precisely that it was a passion exercised on the easiest terms. This was not the region of responsibility. It had the discredit of being sniffed at by the austere ; but if it was not, as they said, a serious field, was not the compensation just that you could not be seriously entangled in it? Sherringham's great advantage, as he regarded the matter, was that he had always kept his taste for the drama quite in its place. His facetious cousin was free to pretend that it sprawled through his life ; but this was nonsense, as any unprejudiced observer of that life would unhesitatingly attest. There had not been the least sprawling, and his fancy for the art of Garrick had never worn the proportions of an eccentricity. It had never drawn down from above anything approaching a reprimand, a remonstrance, a remark. Sherringham was positively proud of his discretion ; for he was a little proud of what he did know about the stage. Trifling for trifling, there were plenty of his fellows who had in their lives private infatuations much sillier and less confessable. Had he not known men who collected old invitation-cards (hungry for those of the last century), and others who had a secret passion for shuffleboard? His little weaknesses were intellectual — they were a part of the life of the mind. All the same, on the day they

showed a symptom of interfering they should be plucked off with a turn of the wrist.

Sherringham scented interference now, and interference in rather an invidious form. It might be a bore, from the point of view of the profession, to find one's self, as a critic of the stage, in love with a *coquine*; but it was a much greater bore to find one's self in love with a young woman whose character remained to be estimated. Miriam Rooth was neither fish nor flesh: one had with her neither the guarantees of one's own class nor the immunities of hers. What was hers, if one came to that? A certain puzzlement about this very point was part of the fascination which she had ended by throwing over him. Poor Sherringham's scheme for getting on had contained no proviso against falling in love, but it had embodied an important clause on the subject of surprises. It was always a surprise to fall in love, especially if one were looking out for it; so this contingency had not been worth official paper. But it became a man who respected the service he had undertaken for the state to be on his guard against predicaments from which the only issue was the rigor of matrimony. An ambitious diplomatist would probably be wise to marry, but only with his eyes very much open. That was the fatal surprise — to be led to the altar in a dream. Sherringham's view of the proprieties attached to such a step was high and strict; and if he held that a man in his

position was, especially as the position improved, essentially a representative of the greatness of his country, he considered that the wife of such a personage would exercise in her degree (for instance, at a foreign court) a function no less symbolic. She would always be, in short, a very important quantity, and the scene was strewn with illustrations of this general truth. She might be such a help and she might be such a blight that common prudence required that one should test her in advance. Sherringham had seen women, in the career, who were stupid or vulgar, make a mess of things—it was enough to wring your heart. Then he had his positive idea of the perfect ambassadress, the full-blown lily of the future; and with this idea Miriam Rooth presented no analogy whatever.

The girl had described herself, with characteristic directness, as “all right;” and so she might be, so she assuredly was: only all right for what? He had divined that she was not sentimental—that whatever capacity she might have for responding to a devotion, or for desiring it was at any rate not in the direction of vague philandering. With him certainly she had no disposition to philander. Sherringham was almost afraid to think of this, lest it should beget in him a rage convertible mainly into caring for her more. Rage or no rage, it would be charming to be in love with her if there were no complications; but the complications were, in advance, just what was

clearest in the business. He was perhaps cold-blooded to think of them; but it must be remembered that they were the particular thing which his training had equipped him for dealing with. He was, at all events, not too cold-blooded to have, for the two months of his holiday, very little inner vision of anything more abstract than Miriam's face. The desire to see it again was as pressing as thirst; but he tried to teach himself the endurance of the traveler in the desert. He kept the Channel between them, but his spirit moved every day an inch nearer to her, until (and it was not long) there were no more inches left. The last thing he expected the future ambassadress to have been was a *fille de théâtre*. The answer to this objection was of course that Miriam was not yet so much of one but that he could easily head her off. Then came worrying retorts to that, chief among which was the sense that to his artistic conscience heading her off would be simple shallowness. The poor girl had a right to her chance, and he should not really alter anything by taking it away from her; for was she not the artist to the tips of her tresses (the ambassadress never in the world), and would she not take it out in something else if one were to make her deviate? So certain was that irrepressible deviltry to insist ever on its own.

Besides, *could* one make her deviate? If she had no disposition to philander, what was his warrant for supposing that she could be cor-

rupted into respectability? How could the career (his career) speak to a nature which had glimpses, as vivid as they were crude, of such a different range, and for which success meant quite another sauce to the dish? Would the brilliancy of marrying Peter Sherringham be such a bribe to relinquishment? How could he think so without fatuity — how could he regard himself as a high prize? Relinquishment of the opportunity to exercise a rare talent was not, in the nature of things, an easy effort to a young lady who was conceited as well as ambitious. Besides, she might eat her cake and have it — might make her fortune both on the stage and in the world. Successful actresses had ended by marrying dukes, and was not that better than remaining obscure and marrying a commoner? There were moments when Sherringham tried to think that Miriam's talent was not a force to reckon with; there was so little to show for it as yet that the caprice of believing in it would perhaps suddenly leave her. But his suspicion that it was real was too uneasy to make such an experiment peaceful, and he came back, moreover, to his deepest impression — that of her being of the turn of mind for which the only consistency is talent. Had not Madame Carré said at the last that she could "do anything"? It was true that if Madame Carré had been mistaken in the first place she might also be mistaken in the second. But in this latter case she would be mistaken with him, and such an error would be too like a truth.

I ought possibly to hesitate to say how much Sherringham felt the discomfort, for him, of the advantage that Miriam had of him — the advantage of her presenting herself in a light which rendered any passion that he might entertain an implication of duty as well as of pleasure. Why there should be this implication was more than he could say ; sometimes he declared to himself that he was superstitious for seeing it. He did n't know, he could scarcely conceive, of another case, of the same general type, in which he would have seen it. In foreign countries there were very few ladies of Miss Rooth's intended profession who would not have regarded it as too strong an order that, to console them for not being admitted into drawing-rooms they should have no offset but the exercise of a virtue in which no one would believe. Because, in foreign countries actresses were not admitted into drawing-rooms : that was a pure English drollery, ministering equally little to histrionics and to the tone of these resorts. Did the sanctity which to his imagination made it a burden to have to reckon with Miriam come from her being English ? Sherringham could remember cases in which that privilege operated as little as possible as a restriction. It came a great deal from Mrs. Rooth, in whom he apprehended depths of calculation as to what she might achieve for her daughter by "working" the idea of a blameless life. Her romantic turn of mind would not in

the least prevent her from regarding that idea as a substantial capital, to be laid out to the best worldly advantage. Miriam's essential irreverence was capable, on a pretext, of making mince-meat of it — that he was sure of ; for the only capital she recognized was the talent which some day managers and agents would outbid each other in paying for. But she was a good-natured creature ; she was fond of her mother, would do anything to oblige (that might work in all sorts of ways), and would probably like the loose slippers of blamelessness quite as well as the high standards of the opposite camp.

Sherringham, I may add, had no desire that she should indulge a different preference : it was foreign to him to compute the probabilities of a young lady's misbehaving for his advantage (that seemed to him definitely base), and he would have thought himself a blackguard if, professing a tenderness for Miriam, he had not wished the thing that was best for her. The thing that was best for her would no doubt be to become the wife of the man to whose suit she should incline her ear. That this would be the best thing for the gentleman in question was, however, a very different matter, and Sherringham's final conviction was that it would never do for him to act the part of that hypothetical personage. He asked for no removal and no extension of leave, and he proved to himself how well he knew what he was about by never addressing a line, during his

absence, to the Hôtel de la Garonne. He would simply go straight, and inflict as little injury upon Peter Sherringham as upon any one else. He remained away to the last hour of his privilege and continued to act lucidly in having nothing to do with the mother and daughter for several days after his return to Paris.

It was when this discipline came to an end, one afternoon, after a week had passed, that he felt most the force of the reference that has just been made to Mrs. Rooth's private reckonings. He found her at home, alone, writing a letter under the lamp, and as soon as he came in she cried out that he was the very person to whom the letter was addressed. She could bear it no longer; she had permitted herself to reproach him with his terrible silence—to ask why he had quite forsaken them. It was an illustration of the way in which her visitor had come to regard her that he rather disbelieved than believed this description of the crumpled papers lying on the table. He was not sure even that he believed that Miriam had just gone out. He told her mother how busy he had been all the while he was away and how much time, in particular, he had had to give, in London, to seeing on her daughter's behalf the people connected with the theatres.

"Ah, if you pity me, tell me that you've got her an engagement!" Mrs. Rooth cried, clasping her hands.

"I took a great deal of trouble ; I wrote ever so many notes, sought introductions, talked with people — such impossible people, some of them. In short I knocked at every door, I went into the question exhaustively." And he enumerated the things he had done, imparted some of the knowledge he had gathered. The difficulties were immense, and even with the influence he could command (such as it was) there was very little to be achieved in face of them. Still, he had gained ground : there were two or three fellows, men with small theatres, who had listened to him better than the others, and there was one in particular whom he had a hope he really might have interested. From him he had extracted certain benevolent assurances : he would see Miriam, he would listen to her, he would do for her what he could. The trouble was that no one would lift a finger for a girl unless she were known, and yet that she never could become known until innumerable fingers were lifted. You could n't go into the water unless you could swim, and you could n't swim until you had been in the water.

"But new performers appear ; they get theatres, they get audiences, they get notices in the newspapers," Mrs. Rooth objected. "I know of these things only what Miriam tells me. It's no knowledge that I was born to."

"It's perfectly true ; it's all done with money."

"And how do they come by money?" Mrs. Rooth asked, candidly.

"When they're women people give it to them."

"Well, what people, now?"

"People who believe in them."

"As you believe in Miriam?"

Sherringham was silent a moment. "No, rather differently. A poor man does n't believe anything in the same way that a rich man does."

"Ah, don't call yourself poor!" groaned Mrs. Rooth.

"What good would it do me to be rich?"

"Why, you could take a theatre; you could do it all yourself."

"And what good would that do me?"

"Why, don't you delight in her genius?" demanded Mrs. Rooth.

"I delight in her mother. You think me more disinterested than I am," Sherringham added, with a certain soreness of irritation.

"I know why you did n't write!" Mrs. Rooth declared, archly.

"You must go to London," Peter said, without heeding this remark.

"Ah, if we could only get there it would be a relief. I should draw a long breath. There, at least, I know where I am, and what people are. But here one lives on hollow ground!"

"The sooner you get away the better," Sherringham went on.

"I know why you say that."

"It's just what I'm explaining."

"I could n't have held out if I had n't been so sure of Miriam," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Well, you need n't hold out any longer."

"Don't *you* trust her?" asked Sherringham's hostess.

"Trust her?"

"You don't trust yourself. That's why you were silent, why we might have thought you were dead, why we might have perished ourselves."

"I don't think I understand you; I don't know what you're talking about," Sherringham said. "But it does n't matter."

"Does n't it? Let yourself go; why should you struggle?" the old woman inquired.

Her unexpected insistence annoyed her visitor, and he was silent again, looking at her, on the point of telling her that he did n't like her tone. But he had his tongue under such control that he was able presently to say, instead of this—and it was a relief to him to give audible voice to the reflection: "It's a great mistake, either way, for a man to be in love with an actress. Either it means nothing serious, and what's the use of that? or it means everything, and that's still more delusive."

"Delusive?"

"Idle, unprofitable."

"Surely, a pure affection is its own reward," Mrs. Rooth rejoined, with soft reasonableness.

"In such a case how can it be pure?"

"I thought you were talking of an English gentleman," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Call the poor fellow whatever you like: a man with his life to lead, his way to make, his work, his duties, his career, to attend to. If it means nothing, as I say, the thing it means least of all is marriage."

"Oh, my own Miriam!" murmured Mrs. Rooth.

"On the other hand, fancy the complication if such a man marries a woman who is on the stage."

Mrs. Rooth looked as if she were trying to follow. "Miriam is n't on the stage yet."

"Go to London, and she soon will be."

"Yes, and then you'll have your excuse."

"My excuse?"

"For deserting us altogether."

Sherringham broke into laughter at this, the tone was so droll. Then he rejoined, "Show me some good acting and I won't desert you."

"Good acting? Ah, what is the best acting compared with the position of an English lady? If you'll take her as she is, you may have her," Mrs. Rooth suddenly added.

"As she is, with all her ambitions unassuaged?"

"To marry *you* — might not that be an ambition?"

"A very paltry one. Don't answer for her, don't attempt that," said Sherringham. "You can do much better."

"Do you think *you* can?" smiled Mrs. Rooth.

"I don't want to ; I only want to let it alone. She's an artist ; you must give her her head," Peter went on. "You must always give an artist his head."

"But I have known great ladies who were artists. In English society there is always a field."

"Don't talk to me of English society ! Thank heaven, in the first place, I don't live in it. Do you want her to give up her genius ?"

"I thought you did n't care for it."

"She'd say, 'No, I thank you, dear mamma.'"

"My gifted child !" Mrs. Rooth murmured.

"Have you ever proposed it to her ?"

"Proposed it ?"

"That she should give up trying."

Mrs. Rooth hesitated, looking down. "Not for the reason you mean. We don't talk about love," she simpered.

"Then it's so much less time wasted. Don't stretch out your hand to the worse when it may some day grasp the better," Sherringham pursued. Mrs. Rooth raised her eyes at him, as if she recognized the force there might be in that, and he added : "Let her blaze out, let her look about her. Then you may talk to me if you like."

"It's very puzzling," the old woman remarked, artlessly.

Sherringham laughed again ; then he said, "Now don't tell me I'm not a good friend."

"You are indeed — you're a very noble gentleman. That's just why a quiet life with you —"

"It would n't be quiet for me!" Sherringham broke in. "And that's not what Miriam was made for."

"Don't say that, for my precious one!" Mrs. Rooth quavered.

"Go to London — go to London," her visitor repeated.

Thoughtfully, after an instant, she extended her hand and took from the table the letter on the composition of which he had found her engaged. Then, with a quick movement, she tore it up. "That's what Mr. Dashwood says."

"Mr. Dashwood?"

"I forgot you don't know him. He's the brother of that lady we met the day you were so good as to receive us; the one who was so kind to us — Mrs. Lovick."

"I never heard of him."

"Don't you remember that she spoke of him, and Mr. Lovick did n't seem very kind about him? She told us that if he were to meet us — and she was so good as to insinuate that it would be a pleasure to him to do so — he might give us, as she said, a tip."

Sherringham indulged in a visible effort to recollect. "Yes, he comes back to me. He's an actor."

"He's a gentleman too," said Mrs. Rooth.

"And you've met him, and he *has* given you a tip?"

"As I say, he wants us to go to London."

"I see, but even I can tell you that."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Rooth; "but *he* says he can help us."

"Keep hold of him, then, if he's in the business."

"He's a perfect gentleman," said Mrs. Rooth.

"He's immensely struck with Miriam."

"Better and better. Keep hold of him."

"Well, I'm glad you don't object," Mrs. Rooth smiled.

"Why should I object?"

"You don't consider us as *all* your own?"

"My own? Why, I regard you as the public's — the world's."

Mrs. Rooth gave a little shudder. "There's a sort of chill in that. It's grand, but it's cold. However, I needn't hesitate, then, to tell you that it's with Mr. Dashwood that Miriam has gone out."

"Why hesitate, gracious heaven?" But in the next breath Sherringham asked: "Where has she gone?"

"You don't like it!" laughed Mrs. Rooth.

"Why should it be a thing to be enthusiastic about?"

"Well, he's charming, and *I* trust him."

"So do I," said Sherringham.

"They've gone to see Madame Carré."

"She has come back, then?"

"She was expected back last week. Miriam wants to show her how she has improved."

"And *has* she improved?"

"How can I tell — with my mother's heart?" asked Mrs. Rooth. "I don't judge; I only wait and pray. But Mr. Dashwood thinks she is wonderful."

"That's a blessing. And when did he turn up?"

"About a fortnight ago. We met Mrs. Lovick at the English church, and she was so good as to recognize us and speak to us. She said she had been away, with her children, or she would have come to see us. She had just returned to Paris."

"Yes, I've not yet seen her," said Sherringham. "I see Lovick, but he does n't talk of his brother-in-law."

"I did n't, that day, like his tone about him," Mrs. Rooth observed. "We walked a little way with Mrs. Lovick, and she asked Miriam about her prospects and if she were working. Miriam said she had no prospects."

"That was not very nice to me," Sherringham interrupted.

"But when you had left us in black darkness, what *were* our prospects?"

"I see; it's all right. Go on."

"Then Mrs. Lovick said her brother was to be in Paris a few days and she would tell him to

come and see us. He arrived, she told him, and he came. *Voilà!*" said Mrs. Rooth.

"So that now (so far as *he* is concerned) Miss Rooth has prospects?"

"He is n't a manager, unfortunately."

"Where does he act?"

"He is n't acting just now; he has been abroad. He has been to Italy, I believe, and he is just stopping here on his way to London."

"I see; he *is* a perfect gentleman," said Sherringham.

"Ah, you're jealous of him."

"No, but you're trying to make me so. The more competitors there are for the glory of bringing her out, the better for her."

"Mr. Dashwood wants to take a theatre," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Then perhaps he's our man."

"Oh, if you'd help him!" cried Mrs. Rooth.

"Help him?"

"Help him to help us."

"We'll all work together; it will be very jolly," said Sherringham gayly. "It's a sacred cause, the love of art, and we shall be a happy band. Dashwood's his name?" he added in a moment.

"Mrs. Lovick was n't a Dashwood."

"It's his *nom de théâtre* — Basil Dashwood. Do you like it?" Mrs. Rooth inquired.

"You say that as Miriam might do: her talent is catching."

"She's always practicing — always saying

things over and over, to seize the tone. I have her voice in my ears. He wants *her* not to have any."

"Not to have any?"

"Any *nom de théâtre*. He wants her to use her own; he likes it so much. He says it will do so well — you can't better it."

"He's a capital adviser," said Sherringham, getting up. "I'll come back to-morrow."

"I won't ask you to wait till they return, they may be so long," Mrs. Rooth replied.

"Will he come back with her?" Sherringham inquired, smoothing his hat.

"I hope so, at this hour. With my child in the streets, I tremble. We don't live in cabs, as you may easily suppose."

"Did they go on foot?" Sherringham continued.

"Oh, yes; they started in high spirits."

"And is Mr. Basil Dashwood acquainted with Madame Carré?"

"Oh, no, but he longed to be introduced to her; he implored Miriam to take him. Naturally she wishes to oblige him. She's very nice to him — if he can do anything."

"Quite right; that's the way."

"And she also wanted him to see what she can do for the great critic," Mrs. Rooth added.

"The great critic?"

"I mean that terrible old woman in the red wig."

"That's what I should like to see too," said Sherringham.

"Oh, she has gone ahead; she is pleased with herself. 'Work, work, work,' said Madame Carré. Well, she has worked, worked, worked. That's what Mr. Dashwood is pleased with even more than with other things."

"What do you mean by other things?"

"Oh, her genius and her fine appearance."

"He approves of her fine appearance? I ask because you think he knows what will take."

"I know why you ask," said Mrs. Rooth. "He says it will be worth hundreds of thousands to her."

"That's the sort of thing I like to hear," Sherringham rejoined. "I'll come in to-morrow," he repeated.

"And shall you mind if Mr. Dashwood's here?"

"Does he come every day?"

"Oh, they're always at it."

"Always at it?"

"Why, she acts to him — every sort of thing — and he says if it will do."

"How many days has he been here, then?"

Mrs. Rooth reflected. "Oh, I don't know. Since he turned up they've passed so quickly."

"So far from 'minding' it, I'm eager to see him," Sherringham declared; "and I can imagine nothing better than what you describe — if he isn't an ass."

“Dear me, if he is n’t clever you must tell us : we can’t afford to be deceived !” Mrs. Rooth exclaimed, innocently and plaintively. “What do we know — how can we judge ?” she added.

Sherringham hesitated, with his hand on the latch. “Oh, I ’ll tell you what I think of him !”

XIX.

WHEN he got into the street he looked about him for a cab, but he was obliged to walk some distance before encountering one. In this little interval he saw no reason to modify the determination he had formed in descending the steep staircase of the Hôtel de la Garonne ; indeed the desire which prompted it only quickened his pace. He had an hour to spare, and he too would go to see Madame Carré. If Miriam and her companion had proceeded to the Rue de Constantinople on foot, he would probably reach the house as soon as they. It was all quite logical : he was eager to see Miriam — that was natural enough ; and he had admitted to Mrs. Rooth that he was keen on the subject of Mrs. Lovick's theatrical brother, in whom such effective aid might perhaps reside. To catch Miriam really revealing herself to the old actress (since that was her errand), with the jump she believed herself to have taken, would be a very happy stroke, the thought of which made her benefactor impatient. He presently found his cab, and, as he bounded in, bade the coachman drive fast. He learned from Madame Carré's portress that her illustrious *locataire* was at home and that a lady and a gentleman had gone up some time before.

In the little antechamber, after he was admitted, he heard a high voice issue from the salon, and, stopping a moment to listen, perceived that Miriam was already launched in a recitation. He was able to make out the words, all the more that before he could prevent the movement the maid-servant who had let him in had already opened the door of the room (one of the wings of it, there being, as in most French doors, two pieces), before which, within, a heavy curtain was suspended. Miriam was in the act of rolling out some speech from the English poetic drama —

“For I am sick and capable of fears,
Oppressed with wrongs and therefore full of fears.”

He recognized one of the great tirades of Shakespeare's Constance, and saw she had just begun the magnificent scene at the beginning of the third act of King John, in which the passionate, injured mother and widow sweeps in wild organ-tones up and down the scale of her irony and wrath. The curtain concealed him and he lurked there for three minutes after he had motioned to the *femme de chambre* to retire on tiptoe. The trio in the salon, absorbed in the performance, had apparently not heard his entrance or the opening of the door, which was covered by the girl's splendid declamation. Sherringham listened intently, he was so arrested by the spirit with which she attacked her formidable verses. He had needed to hear her utter but half a dozen of them to comprehend the long stride she had

taken in his absence; they told him that she had leaped into possession of her means. He remained where he was till she arrived at —

“Then speak again; not all thy former tale,
But this one word, whether thy tale be true.”

This apostrophe, being briefly responded to in another voice, gave him time quickly to raise the curtain and show himself, passing into the room with a “Go on, go on!” and a gesture earnestly deprecating a stop.

Miriam, in the full swing of her part, paused but for an instant and let herself ring out again, while Peter sank into the nearest chair and she fixed him with her illumined eyes, or rather with those of the raving Constance. Madame Carré, buried in a chair, kissed her hand to him, and a young man who stood near the girl, giving her the cue, stared at him over the top of a little book. “Admirable — magnificent; go on,” Sheringham repeated — “go on to the end of the scene — do it all!” Miriam flushed a little, but he immediately discovered that she had no personal emotion in seeing him again; the cold passion of art had perched on her banner and she listened to herself with an ear as vigilant as if she had been a Paganini drawing a fiddle-bow. This effect deepened as she went on, rising and rising to the great occasion, moving with extraordinary ease and in the largest, clearest style on the dizzy ridge of her idea. That she had an idea was visible enough, and that the whole thing

was very different from all that Sherringham had hitherto heard her attempt. It belonged quite to another class of effort; she seemed now like the finished statue, lifted from the ground to its pedestal. It was as if the sun of her talent had risen above the hills and she knew that she was moving, that she would always move, in its guiding light. This conviction was the one artless thing that glimmered, like a young joy, through the tragic mask of Constance, and Sherringham's heart beat faster as he caught it in her face. It only made her appear more intelligent; and yet there had been a time when he had thought her stupid! Intelligent was the whole spirit in which she carried the scene, making him cry to himself, from point to point, "How she feels it — how she sees it — how she creates it!"

He looked, at moments, at Madame Carré, and perceived that she had an open book in her lap, apparently a French prose version, brought by her visitors, of the play; but she never either glanced at him or at the volume: she only sat screwing into the girl her hard bright eyes, polished by experience like fine old brasses. The young man uttering the lines of the other speakers was attentive in another degree; he followed Miriam, in his own copy of the play, to be sure not to miss the cue; but he was elated and expressive, was evidently even surprised; he colored and smiled, and when he extended his hand to assist Constance to rise, after Miriam, acting

out her text, had seated herself grandly on "the huge, firm earth," he bowed over her as obsequiously as if she had been his veritable sovereign. He was a very good looking young man, tall, well proportioned, straight-featured and fair, of whom, manifestly, the first thing to be said, on any occasion, was that he looked remarkably like a gentleman. He carried this appearance, which proved inveterate and importunate, to a point that was almost a negation of its spirit; that is it might have been a question whether it could be in good taste to wear any character, even that particular one, so much on one's sleeve. It was literally on his sleeve that this young man partly wore his own; for it resided considerably in his attire, and in especial in a certain close-fitting dark blue frock-coat (a miracle of a fit), which moulded his young form just enough, and not too much, and constituted (as Sherringham was destined to perceive later) his perpetual uniform or badge. It was not till later that Sherringham began to feel exasperated by Basil Dashwood's "type" (the young stranger was of course Basil Dashwood), and even by his blue frock-coat, the recurrent, unvarying, imperturbable "good form" of his aspect. This unprofessional air ended by striking the observer as the profession that he had adopted, and was indeed (so far as had as yet been indicated) his theatrical capital, his main qualification for the stage.

The powerful, ample manner in which Miriam

handled her scene produced its full impression, the art with which she surmounted its difficulties, the liberality with which she met its great demand upon the voice, and the variety of expression that she threw into a torrent of objurgation. It was a real composition, studded with passages that called a suppressed "*Bravo!*" to the lips and seeming to show that a talent capable of such an exhibition was capable of anything.

"But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great:
Of Nature's gifts thou mayst with lilies boast,
And with the half-blown rose."

As Miriam turned to her imagined child with this exquisite apostrophe (she addressed Mr. Dashwood as if he were playing Arthur, and he lowered his book, dropped his head and his eyes and looked handsome and ingenuous), she opened at a stroke, to Sherringham's vision, a prospect that they would yet see her express tenderness better even than anything else. Her voice was enchanting in these lines, and the beauty of her performance was that while she uttered the full fury of the part she missed none of its poetry.

"Where did she get hold of that — where did she get hold of that?" Sherringham wondered while his whole sense vibrated. "She had n't got hold of it when I went away." And the assurance flowed over him again that she had found the key to her box of treasures. In the summer, during their weeks of frequent meeting, she had

only fumbled with the lock. One October day, while he was away, the key had slipped in, had fitted, or her finger at last had touched the right spring, and the capricious casket had flown open.

It was during the present solemnity that Sherringham, excited by the way she came out and with a hundred startled ideas about her wheeling through his mind, was for the first time and most vividly visited by a perception that ended by becoming frequent with him — that of the perfect presence of mind, unconfused, unhurried by emotion, that any artistic performance requires and that all, whatever the instrument, require in exactly the same degree: the application, in other words, clear and calculated, crystal-firm as it were, of the idea conceived in the glow of experience, of suffering, of joy. Sherringham afterwards often talked of this with Miriam, who, however, was not able to present him with a neat theory of the subject. She had no knowledge that it was publicly discussed; she was only, practically, on the side of those who hold that at the moment of production the artist cannot have his wits too much about him. When Peter told her there were people who maintained that in such a crisis he must lose himself in the flurry, she stared with surprise and then broke out, "Ah, the idiots!" She eventually became, in her judgments, in impatience and the expression of contempt, very free and absolutely irreverent.

“What a splendid scolding!” Sherringham exclaimed when, on the entrance of the Pope’s legate, her companion closed the book upon the scene. Peter pressed his lips to Madame Carré’s finger-tips; the old actress got up and held out her arms to Miriam. The girl never took her eyes off Sherringham while she passed into Madame Carré’s embrace and remained there. They were full of their usual sombre fire, and it was always the case that they expressed too much anything that they expressed at all; but they were not defiant nor even triumphant now — they were only deeply explicative; they seemed to say, “That’s the sort of thing I meant; that’s what I had in mind when I asked you to try to do something for me.” Madame Carré folded her pupil to her bosom, holding her there as the old marquise in a *comédie de mœurs* might, in the last scene, have held her god-daughter the *ingénue*.

“Have you got me an engagement?” Miriam asked of Sherringham. “Yes, he has done something splendid for me,” she went on to Madame Carré, resting her hand caressingly on one of the actress’s while the old woman discoursed with Mr. Dashwood, who was telling her, in very pretty French, that he was tremendously excited about Miss Rooth. Madame Carré looked at him as if she wondered how he appeared when he was calm and how, as a dramatic artist, he expressed that condition.

"Yes, yes, something splendid, for a beginning," Sherringham answered, radiantly, recklessly; feeling now only that he would say anything, do anything, to please her. He spent, on the spot, in imagination, his last penny.

"It's such a pity you couldn't follow it; you would have liked it so much better," Mr. Dashwood observed to his hostess.

"Couldn't follow it? Do you take me for *une sottie*?" the celebrated artist cried. "I suspect I followed it *de plus près que vous, monsieur*!"

"Ah, you see the language is so awfully fine," Basil Dashwood replied, looking at his shoes.

"The language? Why, she rails like a fish-wife. Is that what you call language? Ours is another business."

"If you understood — if you understood you would see the greatness of it," Miriam declared. And then, in another tone: "Such delicious expressions!"

"On dit que c'est très-fort. But who can tell if you really say it?" Madame Carré demanded.

"Ah, *par exemple*, I can!" Sherringham exclaimed.

"Oh, you — you're a Frenchman."

"Couldn't he tell if he were not?" asked Basil Dashwood.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders. "He would n't know."

"That's flattering to me."

"Oh, you — don't you pretend to complain," Madame Carré said. "I prefer *our* imprecations — those of Camille," she went on. "They have the beauty *des plus belles choses*."

"I can say them too," Miriam broke in.

"*Insolente !*" smiled Madame Carré. "Camille does n't squat down on the floor in the middle of them."

"For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.
To me and to the state of my great grief
Let kings assemble,"

Miriam quickly declaimed. "Ah, if you don't feel the way she makes a throne of it !"

"It's really tremendously fine, *chère madame*," Sherringham said. "There's nothing like it."

"Vous êtes insupportables," the old woman answered. "Stay with us. I'll teach you Phèdre."

"Ah, Phædra — Phædra !" Basil Dashwood vaguely ejaculated, looking more gentlemanly than ever.

"You have learned all I have taught you, but where the devil have you learned what I have n't taught you ?" Madame Carré went on.

"I've worked — I have ; you'd call it work — all through the bright, late summer, all through the hot, dull, empty days. I've battered down the door — I did hear it crash one day. But I'm not so very good yet ; I'm only in the right direction."

"*Malicieuse !*" murmured Madame Carré.

"Oh, I can beat that," the girl went on.

"Did you wake up one morning and find you had grown a pair of wings?" Sherringham asked. "Because that's what the difference amounts to — you really soar. Moreover, you're an angel," he added, charmed with her unexpectedness, the good-nature of her forbearance to reproach him for not having written to her. And it seemed to him, privately, that she *was* angelic when, in answer to this, she said, ever so blandly :

"You know you read King John with me before you went away. I thought over immensely what you said. I did n't understand it much at the time — I was so stupid. But it all came to me later."

"I wish you could see yourself," Sherringham answered.

"My dear fellow, I do. What do you take me for? I did n't miss a vibration of my voice, a fold of my robe."

"I did n't see you looking," Sherringham returned.

"No one ever will. Do you think I would show it?"

"*Ars celare artem*," Basil Dashwood jocosely dropped.

"You must first have the art to hide," said Sherringham, wondering a little why Miriam did n't introduce her young friend to him. She was, however, both then and later, perfectly neglectful of such cares, never thinking or heeding how other people got on together. When she

found they did n't get on she laughed at them : that was the nearest she came to arranging for them. Sherringham observed, from the moment she felt her strength, the immense increase of her good-humored inattention to detail — all detail save that of her work, to which she was ready to sacrifice holocausts of feelings, when the feelings were other people's. This conferred on her a kind of profanity, an absence of ceremony in her social relations which was both amusing, because it suggested that she would take what she gave, and formidable, because it was inconvenient and you might not care to give what she would take.

"If you have n't got any art, it's not quite the same as if you did n't hide it, is it?" asked Basil Dashwood.

"That's right — say one of your clever things!" murmured Miriam, sweetly, to the young man.

"You're always acting," he answered, in English, with a laugh, while Sherringham remained struck with his expressing just what he himself had felt weeks before.

"And when you have shown them your fish-wife, to your public *de-là-bas*, what will you do next?" asked Madame Carré.

"I'll do Juliet — I'll do Cleopatra."

"Rather a big bill, is n't it?" Mr. Dashwood volunteered to Sherringham, in a friendly, discriminating manner.

"Constance and Juliet — take care you don't mix them," said Sherringham.

"I want to be various. You once told me I had a hundred characters," Miriam replied.

"Ah, *vous-en-êtes là ?*" cried the old actress. "You may have a hundred characters, but you have only three plays. I'm told that's all there are in English."

Miriam appealed to Sherringham. "What arrangements have you made? What do the people want?"

"The people at the theatre?"

"I'm afraid they don't want King John, and I don't believe they hunger for Antony and Cleopatra," Basil Dashwood suggested. "Ships and sieges and armies and pyramids, you know: we mustn't be too heavy."

"Oh, I hate scenery!" sighed Miriam.

"Elle est superbe," said Madame Carré. "You must put those pieces on the stage: how will you do it?"

"Oh, we know how to get up a play in London, Madame Carré," Basil Dashwood responded, genially. "They put money on it, you know."

"On it? But what do they put *in* it? Who will interpret them? Who will manage a style like that — the style of which the verses she just repeated are a specimen? Whom have you got that one has ever heard of?"

"Oh, you'll hear of a good deal when once she gets started," Basil Dashwood contended, cheerfully.

Madame Carré looked at him a moment; then,

"You'll become very bad," she said to Miriam. "I'm glad I sha'n't see it."

"People will do things for me — I'll make them," the girl declared. "I'll stir them up so that they'll have ideas."

"What people, pray?"

"Ah, terrible woman!" Sherringham moaned, theatrically.

"We translate your pieces — there will be plenty of parts," Basil Dashwood said.

"Why then go out of the door to come in at the window? — especially if you smash it! An English arrangement of a French piece is a pretty woman with her back turned."

"Do you really want to keep her?" Sherringham asked of Madame Carré, as if he were thinking for a moment that this after all might be possible.

She bent her strange eyes on him. "No, you are all too queer together; we could n't be bothered with you, and you're not worth it."

"I'm glad it's together; we can console each other."

"If you only would; but you don't seem to! In short, I don't understand you — I give you up. But it does n't matter," said the old woman, wearily, "for the theatre is dead and even you, *ma toute-belle*, won't bring it to life. Everything is going from bad to worse, and I don't care what becomes of you. You would n't understand us here and they won't understand you there, and

everything is impossible, and no one is a whit the wiser, and it's not of the least consequence. Only when you raise your arms, lift them just a little higher," Madame Carré added.

"My mother will be happier *chez nous*," said Miriam, throwing her arms straight up, with a noble tragic movement.

"You won't be in the least in the right path till your mother's in despair."

"Well, perhaps we can bring that about even in London," Sherringham suggested, laughing.

"Dear Mrs. Rooth — she's great fun," Mr. Dashwood dropped.

Miriam transferred the gloomy beauty of her gaze to him, as if she were practicing. "*You* won't upset her, at any rate." Then she stood, with her fatal mask, before Madame Carré. "I want to do the modern too. I want to do *le drame*, with realistic effects."

"And do you want to look like the portico of the Madeleine when it's draped for a funeral?" her instructress mocked. "Never, never. I don't believe you're various: that's not the way I see you. You're pure tragedy, with *de grands effets de voix*, in the great style, or you're nothing."

"Be beautiful — be only that," Sherringham urged. "Be only what you can be so well — something that one may turn to for a glimpse of perfection, to lift one out of all the vulgarities of the day."

Thus apostrophized, the girl broke out with one of the speeches of Racine's Phædra, hushing her companions on the instant. "You'll be the English Rachel," said Basil Dashwood when she stopped.

"Acting in French!" Madame Carré exclaimed. "I don't believe in an English Rachel."

"I shall have to work it out, what I shall be," Miriam responded, with a rich, pensive effect.

"You're in wonderfully good form to-day," Sherringham said to her; his appreciation revealing a personal subjection which he was unable to conceal from his companions, much as he wished it.

"I really mean to do everything."

"Very well; after all, Garrick did."

"Well, I shall be the Garrick of my sex."

"There's a very clever author doing something for me; I should like you to see it," said Basil Dashwood, addressing himself equally to Miriam and to her diplomatic friend.

"Ah, if you have very clever authors!" And Madame Carré spun the sound to the finest satiric thread.

"I shall be very happy to see it," said Sherringham.

This response was so benevolent that Basil Dashwood presently began: "May I ask you at what theatre you have made arrangements?"

Sherringham looked at him a moment. "Come and see me at the Embassy and I'll tell you."

Then he added, "I know your sister, Mrs. Lovick."

"So I supposed: that's why I took the liberty of asking such a question."

"It's no liberty; but Mr. Sherringham does n't appear to be able to tell you," said Miriam.

"Well, you know, it's a very curious world, all those theatrical people over there," Sherringham said.

"Ah, don't say anything against them, when I'm one of them," Basil Dashwood laughed.

"I might plead the absence of information, as Miss Rooth has neglected to make us acquainted."

Miriam smiled: "I know you both so little." But she presented them, with a great stately air, to each other, and the two men shook hands while Madame Carré observed them.

"*Tiens!* you gentlemen meet here for the first time? You do right to become friends — that's the best thing. Live together in peace and mutual confidence. *C'est de beaucoup le plus sage.*"

"Certainly, for yoke-fellows," said Sherringham.

He began the next moment to repeat to his new acquaintance some of the things he had been told in London; but their hostess stopped him off, waving the talk away with charming overdone stage horror and the young hands of the heroines of Marivaux. "Ah, wait till you go, for that! Do you suppose I care for news of your mountebanks' booths?"

XX.

As many people know, there are not, in the famous Théâtre Français, more than a dozen good seats accessible to ladies. The stalls are forbidden them, the boxes are a quarter of a mile from the stage and the balcony is a delusion save for a few chairs at either end of its vast horseshoe. But there are two excellent *baignoires d'avant-scène*, which indeed are by no means always to be had. It was, however, into one of them that, immediately after his return to Paris, Sherringham ushered Mrs. Rooth and her daughter, with the further escort of Basil Dashwood. He had chosen the evening of the reappearance of the celebrated Mademoiselle Voisin (she had been enjoying a *congé* of three months), an actress whom Miriam had seen several times before and for whose method she professed a high though somewhat critical esteem. It was only for the return of this charming performer that Sherringham had been waiting to respond to Miriam's most ardent wish — that of spending an hour in the *foyer des artistes* of the great theatre. She was the person whom he knew best in the house of Molière; he could count upon her to do them the honors, some night when she was in the

"bill," and make the occasion sociable. Miriam had been impatient for it — she was so convinced that her eyes would be opened in the holy of holies ; but wishing particularly, as he did, to participate in her impression, he had made her promise that she would not taste of this experience without him — not let Madame Carré, for instance, take her in his absence. There were questions the girl wished to put to Mademoiselle Voisin — questions which, having admired her from the balcony, she felt she was exactly the person to answer. She was more "in it" now, after all, than Madame Carré, in spite of her slenderer talent : she was younger, fresher, more modern and (Miriam found the word) less academic. Sherringham perfectly foresaw the day when his young friend would make indulgent allowances for poor Madame Carré, patronizing her as an old woman of good intentions.

The play, to-night, was six months old, a large, serious, successful comedy, by the most distinguished of authors, with a thesis, a chorus, embodied in one character, a *scène à faire* and a part full of opportunities for Mademoiselle Voisin. There were things to be said about this artist, strictures to be dropped as to the general quality of her art, and Miriam leaned back now, making her comments as if they cost her less ; but the actress had knowledge and distinction and pathos, and our young lady repeated several times, "How quiet she is, how wonderfully quiet !

Scarcely anything moves but her face and her voice. *Le geste rare*, but really expressive when it comes. I like that economy; it's the only way to make the gesture significant."

"I don't admire the way she holds her arms," Basil Dashwood said: "like a *demoiselle de magasin* trying on a jacket."

"Well, she holds them, at any rate. I dare say it's more than you do with yours."

"Oh, yes, she holds them; there's no mistake about that. 'I hold them, I hope, *hein?*' she seems to say to all the house." The young English professional laughed good-humoredly, and Sherringham was struck with the pleasant familiarity he had established with their brave companion. He was knowing and ready and he said, in the first *entr'acte* (they were waiting for the second, to go behind), amusing, perceptive things. "They teach them to be ladylike, and Voisin is always trying to show that. 'See how I walk, see how I sit, see how quiet I am and how I have *le geste rare*. Now can you say I ain't a lady?' She does it all as if she had a class."

"Well, to-night I'm her class," said Miriam.

"Oh, I don't mean of actresses, but of *femmes du monde*. She shows them how to act in society."

"You had better take a few lessons," Miriam retorted.

"You should see Voisin in society," Sherringham interposed.

"Does she go into it?" Mrs. Rooth demanded, with interest.

Sherringham hesitated. "She receives a great many people."

"Why should n't they, when they're nice?" Mrs. Rooth continued.

"When the people are nice?" Miriam asked.

"Now don't tell me *she*'s not what one would wish," said Mrs. Rooth to Sherringham.

"It depends upon what that is," he answered, smiling.

"What I should wish if she were my daughter," the old woman rejoined, blandly.

"Ah, wish your daughter to act as well as that and you'll do the handsome thing for her!"

"Well, she *seems* to feel what she says," Mrs. Rooth murmured, piously.

"She has some stiff things to say. I mean about her past," Basil Dashwood remarked.

"The past — the dreadful past — on the stage!"

"Wait till the end, to see how she comes out. We must all be merciful!" sighed Mrs. Rooth.

"We've seen it before; you know what happens," Miriam observed to her mother.

"I've seen so many, I get them mixed."

"Yes, they're all in queer predicaments. Poor old mother — what we show you!" laughed the girl.

"Ah, it will be what *you* show me, something noble and wise!"

"I want to do this; it's a magnificent part," said Miriam.

"You could n't put it on in London; they would n't swallow it," Basil Dashwood declared.

"Are n't there things they do there, to get over the difficulties?"

"You can't get over what *she* did," the young man replied.

"Yes, we must pay, we must expiate!" Mrs. Rooth moaned, as the curtain rose again.

When the second act was over our friends passed out of their *baignoire* into those corridors of tribulation where the bristling *ouvreuse*, like a pawnbroker driving a roaring trade, mounts guard upon piles of heterogeneous clothing, and, gaining the top of the fine staircase which forms the state entrance and connects the statued vestibule of the basement with the grand tier of boxes, opened an ambiguous door, composed of little mirrors, and found themselves in the society of the initiated. The janitors were courteous folk who greeted Sherringham as an acquaintance, and he had no difficulty in marshaling his little troop toward the foyer. They traversed a low, curving lobby, hung with pictures and furnished with velvet-covered benches, where several unrecognized persons, of both sexes, looked at them without hostility, and arrived at an opening, on the right, from which, by a short flight of steps, there was a descent to one of the wings of the stage. Here Miriam paused, in silent excitement, like a young warrior arrested by a glimpse of the battlefield. Her vision was carried off, through

a lane of light, to the point of vantage from which the actor held the house ; but there was a hushed guard over the place, and curiosity could only glance and pass.

Then she came with her companions to a sort of parlor with a polished floor, not large and rather vacant, where her attention flew delightedly to a coat-tree, in a corner, from which three or four dresses were suspended — dresses that she immediately perceived to be costumes in that night's play — accompanied by a saucer of something and a much-worn powder-puff casually left upon a sofa. This was a familiar note in a general impression (it had begun at the threshold) of high decorum — a sense of majesty in the place. Miriam rushed at the powder-puff (there was no one in the room), snatched it up and gazed at it with droll veneration, then stood rapt a moment before the charming petticoats ("That's Dunoyer's first underskirt," she said to her mother), while Sherringham explained that in this apartment an actress traditionally changed her gown, when the transaction was simple enough, to save the long ascent to her *loge*. He felt like a cicerone showing a church to a party of provincials ; and indeed there was a grave hospitality in the air, mingled with something academic and important, the tone of an institution, a temple, which made them all, out of respect and delicacy, hold their breath a little and tread the shining floors with discretion.

These precautions increased (Mrs. Rooth crept in like a friendly but undomesticated cat), after they entered the foyer itself, a square spacious saloon, covered with pictures and relics and draped in official green velvet, where the *genius loci* holds a reception every night in the year. The effect was freshly charming to Sherringham ; he was fond of the place, always saw it again with pleasure, enjoyed its honorable look and the way, among the portraits and scrolls, the records of a splendid history, the green velvet and the waxed floors, the *genius loci* seemed to be "at home" in the quiet lamplight. At the end of the room, in an ample chimney, blazed a fire of logs. Miriam said nothing ; they looked about, noting that most of the portraits and pictures were "old-fashioned," and Basil Dashwood expressed disappointment at the absence of all the people they wanted most to see. Three or four gentlemen, in evening dress, circulated slowly, looking, like themselves, at the pictures, and another gentleman stood before a lady, with whom he was in conversation, seated against the wall. The foyer, in these conditions, resembled a ball-room, cleared for the dance, before the guests or the music had arrived.

"Oh, it's enough to see *this* ; it makes my heart beat," said Miriam. "It's full of the vanished past, it makes me cry. I feel them here, the great artists I shall never see. Think of Rachel (look at her grand portrait there!) and

how she stood on these very boards and trailed over them the robes of Hermione and Phèdre ! ”

The girl broke out theatrically, as on the spot was right, not a bit afraid of her voice as soon as it rolled through the room ; appealing to her companions as they stood under the chandelier and making the other persons present, who had already given her some attention, turn round to stare at so unusual a specimen of the English miss. She laughed, musically, when she noticed this, and her mother, scandalized, begged her to lower her tone. “ It’s all right. I produce an effect,” said Miriam : “ it sha’n’t be said that I too have n’t had my little success in the maison de Molière.” And Sherringham repeated that it was all right — the place was familiar with mirth and passion, there was often wonderful talk there, and it was only the setting that was still and solemn. It happened that this evening — there was no knowing in advance — the scene was not characteristically brilliant ; but to confirm his assertion, at the moment he spoke, Mademoiselle Dunoyer, who was also in the play, came into the room attended by a pair of gentlemen.

She was the celebrated, the perpetual, the necessary *ingénue*, who with all her talent could not have represented a woman of her actual age. She had the gliding, hopping movement of a small bird, the same air of having nothing to do with time, and the clear, sure, piercing note, a miracle of exact vocalization. She chaffed her

companions, she chaffed the room ; she seemed to be a very clever little girl trying to personate a more innocent big one. She scattered her amiability about (showing Miriam how much the children of Molière took their ease), and it quickly placed her in the friendliest communication with Peter Sherringham, who already enjoyed her acquaintance and who now extended it to his companions, and in particular to the young lady *sur le point d'entrer au théâtre*.

"You deserve a happier lot," said the actress, looking up at Miriam brightly, as if to a great height, and taking her in ; upon which Sherringham left them together a little and led Mrs. Rooth and young Dashwood to consider further some of the pictures.

"Most delightful, most curious," the old woman murmured, about everything ; while Basil Dashwood exclaimed, in the presence of most of the portraits : "But their ugliness — their ugliness : did you ever see such a collection of hideous people ? And those who were supposed to be good-looking — the beauties of the past — they are worse than the others. Ah, you may say what you will, *nous sommes mieux que ça !*" Sherringham suspected him of irritation, of not liking the theatre of the great rival nation to be thrust down his throat. They returned to Miriam and Mademoiselle Dunoyer, and Sherringham asked the actress a question about one of the portraits, to which there was no name at-

tached. She replied, like a child who had only played about the room, that she was *toute honteuse* not to be able to tell him the original: she had forgotten, she had never asked — “Vous allez me trouver bien légère.” She appealed to the other persons present, who formed a gallery for her, and laughed in delightful ripples at their suggestions, which she covered with ridicule. She bestirred herself; she declared she would ascertain, she should not be happy till she did, and swam out of the room, with the prettiest paddles, to obtain the information, leaving behind her a perfume of delicate kindness and gayety. She seemed above all things obliging, and Sherringham said that she was almost as natural off the stage as on. She did n’t come back.

XXI.

WHETHER Sherringham had prearranged it is more than I can say, but Mademoiselle Voisin delayed so long to show herself that Mrs. Rooth, who wished to see the rest of the play, though she had sat it out on another occasion, expressed a returning relish for her corner of the *baignoire* and gave her conductor the best pretext he could have desired for asking Basil Dashwood to be so good as to escort her back. When the young actor, of whose personal preference Sherringham was quite aware, had led Mrs. Rooth away with an absence of moroseness which showed that his striking analogy with a gentleman was not kept for the footlights, the two others sat on a divan in the part of the room furthest from the entrance, so that it gave them a degree of privacy, and Miriam watched the coming and going of their fellow-visitors and the indefinite people, attached to the theatre, hanging about, while her companion gave a name to some of the figures, Parisian celebrities.

“Fancy poor Dashwood, cooped up there with mamma!” the girl exclaimed, whimsically.

“You are awfully cruel to him; but that’s of course,” said Sherringham.

"It seems to me I'm as kind as you; you sent him off."

"That was for your mother; she was tired."

"Oh, gammon! And why, if I *were* cruel, should it be of course?"

"Because you must destroy and torment and consume — that's your nature. But you can't help your type, can you?"

"My type?" the girl repeated.

"It's bad, perverse, dangerous. It's essentially insolent."

"And pray what is yours, when you talk like that? Would you say such things if you did n't know the depths of my good-nature?"

"Your good-nature all comes back to that," said Sherringham. "It's an abyss of ruin — for others. You have no respect. I'm speaking of the artistic character, in the direction and in the plenitude in which you have it. It's unscrupulous, nervous, capricious, wanton."

"I don't know about respect; one can be good," Miriam reasoned.

"It does n't matter, so long as one is powerful," answered Sherringham. "We can't have everything, and surely we ought to understand that we must pay for things. A splendid organization for a special end, like yours, is so rare and rich and fine that we ought n't to grudge it its conditions."

"What do you call its conditions?" Miriam demanded, turning and looking at him.

"Oh, the need to take its ease, to take up space, to make itself at home in the world, to square its elbows and knock others about. That's large and free; it's the good-nature you speak of. You must forage and ravage and leave a track behind you; you must live upon the country you traverse. And you give such delight that, after all, you are welcome — you are infinitely welcome!"

"I don't know what you mean. I only care for the idea," Miriam said.

"That's exactly what I pretend; and we must all help you to it. You use us, you push us about, you break us up. We are your tables and chairs, the simple furniture of your life."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

Sherringham gave a laugh. "Oh, don't be afraid — there will be plenty of others."

Miriam made no rejoinder to this, but after a moment she broke out again: "Poor Dashwood, immured with mamma — he's like a lame chair that one has put into the corner."

"Don't break him up before he has served. I really believe that something will come out of him," her companion went on. "However, you'll break me up first," he added, "and him probably never at all."

"And why shall I honor you so much more?"

"Because I'm a better article, and you'll feel that."

"You have the superiority of modesty — I see."

"I'm better than a young mountebank — I've vanity enough to say that."

She turned upon him with a flush in her cheek and a splendid dramatic face. "How you hate us! Yes, at bottom, below your little taste, you *hate* us!" she repeated.

He colored too, met her eyes, looked into them a minute, seemed to accept the imputation, and then said, quickly, "Give it up: come away with me."

"Come away with you?"

"Leave this place; give it up."

"You brought me here, you insisted it should be only you, and now you must stay," she declared, with a head-shake and a laugh. "You should know what you want, dear Mr. Sherringham."

"I do — I know now. Come away, before she comes."

"Before she comes?"

"She's success — this wonderful Voisin — she's triumph, she's full accomplishment: the hard, brilliant realization of what I want to avert for you." Miriam looked at him in silence, the angry light still in her face, and he repeated: "Give it up — give it up."

Her eyes softened after a moment; she smiled, and then she said: "Yes, you're better than poor Dashwood."

"Give it up, and we'll live for ourselves, *in* ourselves, in something that can have a sanctity."

"All the same, you do hate us," the girl went on.

"I don't want to be conceited, but I mean that I'm sufficiently fine and complicated to tempt you. I'm an expensive modern watch, with a wonderful escapement — therefore you'll smash me if you can."

"Never — never!" said the girl, getting up. "You tell me the hour too well." She quitted her companion and stood looking at Gérôme's fine portrait of the pale Rachel, invested with the antique attributes of tragedy. The rise of the curtain had drawn away most of the company. Sherringham, from his bench, watched Miriam a little, turning his eye from her to the vivid image of the dead actress and thinking that his companion suffered little by the juxtaposition. Presently he came over and joined her again, and she said to him, "I wonder if that is what your cousin had in his mind."

"My cousin?"

"What was his name? Mr. Dormer; that first day at Madame Carré's. He offered to paint my portrait."

"I remember. I put him up to it."

"Was he thinking of this?"

"I don't think he has ever seen it. I dare say I was."

"Well, when we go to London he must do it," said Miriam.

"Oh, there's no hurry," Sherringham replied.

"Don't you want my picture?" asked the girl, with one of her successful touches.

"I'm not sure I want it from him. I don't know quite what he'd make of you."

"He looked so clever—I liked him. I saw him again at your party."

"He's a dear fellow; but what is one to say of a painter who goes for his inspiration to the House of Commons?"

"To the House of Commons?"

"He has lately got himself elected."

"Dear me, what a pity! I wanted to sit for him; but perhaps he won't have me, as I'm not a member of Parliament."

"It's my sister, rather, who has got him in."

"Your sister, who was at your house that day? What has she to do with it?"

"Why, she's his cousin, just as I am. And in addition," Sherringham went on, "she's to be married to him."

"Married—really? So he paints *her*, I suppose?"

"Not much, probably. His talent in that line is n't what she esteems in him most."

"It is n't great, then?"

"I have n't the least idea."

"And in the political line?"

"I scarcely can tell. He's very clever."

"He does paint, then?"

"I dare say."

Miriam looked at Gérôme's picture again.

"Fancy his going into the House of Commons! And your sister put him there?"

"She worked, she canvassed."

"Ah, you're a queer family!" the girl exclaimed, turning round at the sound of a step.

"We're lost — here's Mademoiselle Voisin," said Sherringham.

This celebrity presented herself smiling and addressing Miriam. "I acted for *you* to-night — I did my best."

"What a pleasure to speak to you, to thank you!" the girl murmured, admiringly. She was startled and dazzled.

"I could n't come to you before, but now I've got a rest — for half an hour," the actress went on. Gracious and passive, as if she were a little tired, she let Sherringham, without looking at him, take her hand and raise it to his lips. "I'm sorry I make you lose the others — they are so good in this act," she added.

"We have seen them before, and there's nothing so good as you," Miriam replied.

"I like my part," said Mademoiselle Voisin, gently, smiling still at our young lady with clear, charming eyes. "One is always better, in that case."

"She's so bad sometimes, you know!" Sherringham jested, to Miriam; leading the actress to glance at him kindly and vaguely, with a little silence which, with her, you could not call embarrassment; but which was still less affectation.

"And it's so interesting to be here — *so* interesting!" Miriam declared.

"Ah, you like our old house? Yes, we are very proud of it." And Mademoiselle Voisin smiled again at Sherringham, good-humoredly, as if to say: "Well, here I am, and what do you want of me? Don't ask me to invent it myself, but if you'll tell me I'll do it." Miriam admired the note of discreet interrogation in her voice — the slight suggestion of surprise at their "old house" being liked. The actress was already an astonishment to her, from her seeming still more perfect on a nearer view, which was not, she had an idea, what actresses usually did. This was very encouraging to her; it widened the programme of a young lady about to embrace the scenic career. To have so much to show before the footlights and yet to have so much left when you came off — that was really wonderful. Mademoiselle Voisin's eyes, as one looked into them, were still more agreeable than the distant spectator would have supposed; and there was in her appearance an extreme finish which instantly suggested to Miriam that she herself, in comparison, was big and rough and coarse.

"You're lovely to-night — you're particularly lovely," said Sherringham, very frankly, translating Miriam's own impression and at the same time giving her an illustration of the way that, in Paris at least, gentlemen expressed themselves to the stars of the drama. She thought she

knew her companion very well, and had been witness of the degree to which, under these circumstances, his familiarity could increase ; but his address to the slim, distinguished, harmonious woman before them had a different quality, the note of a special usage. If Miriam had had any apprehension that such directness might be taken as excessive, it was removed by the manner in which Mademoiselle Voisin returned —

“ Oh, one is always well enough when one is made up ; one is always exactly the same.” That served as an example of the good taste with which a star of the drama could receive homage that was wanting in originality. Miriam determined, on the spot, that this should be the way *she* would receive it. The grace of her new acquaintance was the greater as the becoming bloom which she alluded to as artificial was the result of a science so consummate that it had none of the grossness of a mask. The perception of all this was exciting to our young aspirant, and her excitement relieved itself in the inquiry, which struck her as rude as soon as she had uttered it —

“ You acted for me ? How did you know ? What am I to you ? ”

“ Monsieur Sherringham has told me about you. He says we are nothing beside you ; that you are to be the great star of the future. I ’m proud that you ’ve seen me.”

“ That of course is what I tell every one,”

Sherringham said, a trifle awkwardly, to Miriam.

"I can believe it when I see you. *Je vous ai bien observée,*" the actress continued in her sweet, conciliatory tone.

Miriam looked from one of her interlocutors to the other, as if there was a joy to her in this report of Sherringham's remarks, accompanied, however, and partly mitigated, by a quicker vision of what might have passed between a secretary of embassy and a creature so exquisite as *Mademoiselle Voisin*.

"Ah, you're wonderful people — a most interesting impression!" she sighed.

"I was looking for you; he had prepared me. We are such old friends!" said the actress, in a tone courteously exempt from intention: upon which Sherringham again took her hand and raised it to his lips, with a tenderness which her whole appearance seemed to bespeak for her, a sort of practical consideration and carefulness of touch, as if she were an object precious and frail, an instrument for producing rare sounds, to be handled, like a legendary violin, with a recognition of its value.

"Your dressing-room is so pretty — show her your dressing-room," said Sherringham.

"Willingly, if she'll come up. *Vous savez c'est une montée.*"

"It's a shame to inflict it on *you*," Miriam objected.

“Comment donc? If it will interest you in the least!” They exchanged civilities, almost caresses, trying which could have the nicest manner to the other. It was the actress’s manner that struck Miriam most; it denoted such a training, so much taste, expressed such a ripe conception of urbanity.

“No wonder she acts well when she has that tact — feels, perceives, is so remarkable, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*” Miriam said to herself as they followed their conductress into another corridor and up a wide, plain staircase. The staircase was spacious and long, and this part of the establishment was sombre and still, with the gravity of a college or a convent. They reached another passage, lined with little doors, on each of which the name of a comedian was painted; and here the aspect became still more monastic, like that of a row of solitary cells. Mademoiselle Voisin led the way to her own door, obligingly, as if she wished to be hospitable, dropping little subdued, friendly attempts at explanation on the way. At her threshold the monasticism stopped. Miriam found herself in a wonderfully upholstered nook, a nest of lamplight and delicate cretonne. Save for its pair of long glasses it looked like a tiny boudoir, with a water-color drawing of value in each panel of stretched stuff, its crackling fire, its charming order. It was intensely bright and extremely hot, singularly pretty and exempt from litter. Nothing was lying about, but a small

draped doorway led into an inner sanctuary. To Miriam it seemed royal ; it immediately made the art of the comedian the most distinguished thing in the world. It was just such a place as they *should* have, in the intervals, if they were expected to be great artists. It was a result of the same evolution as Mademoiselle Voisin herself — not that our young lady found this particular term to her hand, to express her idea. But her mind was flooded with an impression of style, of refinement, of the long continuity of a tradition. The actress said, “ *Voilà c’est tout !* ” as if it were little enough and there were even something clumsy in her having brought them so far for nothing, and in their all sitting there waiting and looking at each other till it was time for her to change her dress. But to Miriam it was occupation enough to note what she did and said : these things and her whole person and carriage struck her as exquisite in their adaptation to the particular occasion. She had had an idea that foreign actresses were rather of the *cabotin* order ; but her hostess suggested to her much more a princess than a cabotine. She would do things as she liked, and straight off : Miriam could n’t fancy her in the gropings and humiliations of rehearsal. Everything in her had been sifted and formed, her tone was perfect, her amiability complete, and she might have been the charming young wife of a secretary of state receiving a pair of strangers of distinction. Miriam observed

all her movements. And then, as Sherringham had said, she was particularly lovely.

Suddenly she told Sherringham that she must put him *à la porte* — she wanted to change her dress. He retired and returned to the foyer, where Miriam was to rejoin him after remaining the few minutes more with Mademoiselle Voisin and coming down with her. He waited for his companion, walking up and down and making up his mind; and when she presently came in he said to her:

“Please don’t go back for the rest of the play. Stay here.” They now had the foyer virtually to themselves.

“I want to stay here. I like it better.” She moved back to the chimney-piece, from above which the cold portrait of Rachel looked down, and as he accompanied her he said:

“I meant what I said just now.”

“What you said to Voisin?”

“No, no; to you. Give it up and live with me.”

“Give it up?” And she turned her stage face upon him.

“Give it up, and I’ll marry you to-morrow.”

“This is a happy time to ask it!” she mocked. “And this is a good place.”

“Very good indeed, and that’s why I speak: it’s a place to make one choose — it puts it all before one.”

“To make *you* choose, you mean. I’m much

obliged, but that's not my choice," laughed Miriam.

"You shall be anything you like, except this."

"Except what I most want to be? I *am* much obliged."

"Don't you care for me? Haven't you any gratitude?" Sherringham asked.

"Gratitude for kindly removing the blessed cup from my lips? I want to be what *she* is — I want it more than ever."

"Ah, what she is!" he replied impatiently.

"Do you mean I can't? We'll see if I can't. Tell me more about her — tell me everything."

"Haven't you seen for yourself, and can't you judge?"

"She's strange, she's mysterious," Miriam declared, looking at the fire. "She showed us nothing — nothing of her real self."

"So much the better, all things considered."

"Are there all sorts of other things in her life? That's what I believe," Miriam went on, raising her eyes to him.

"I can't tell you what there is in the life of such a woman."

"Imagine — when she's so perfect!" the girl exclaimed, thoughtfully. "Ah, she kept me off — she kept me off! Her charming manner is in itself a kind of contempt. It's an abyss — it's the wall of China. She has a hard polish, an inimitable surface, like some wonderful porcelain that costs more than you'd think."

"Do you want to become like that?" Sherringham asked.

"If I could I should be enchanted. One can always try."

"You must act better than she," said Sherringham.

"Better? I thought you wanted me to give it up."

"Ah, I don't know what I want, and you torment me and turn me inside out! What I want is you yourself."

"Oh, don't worry," said Miriam, kindly. Then she added that Mademoiselle Voisin had asked her to come to see her; to which Sherringham replied, with a certain dryness, that she would probably not find that necessary. This made Miriam stare, and she asked: "Do you mean it won't do, on account of mamma's prejudices?"

"Say, this time, on account of mine."

"Do you mean because she has lovers?"

"Her lovers are none of our business."

"None of mine, I see. So you have been one of them?"

"No such luck."

"What a pity! I should have liked to see that. One must see everything, to be able to do everything." And as he inquired what she had wished to see she replied: "The way a woman like that receives one of the old ones."

Sherringham gave a groan at this, which was at the same time partly a laugh, and, turning

away and dropping upon a bench, ejaculated :
“ You ’ll do — you ’ll do ! ”

He sat there some minutes, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. Miriam remained looking at the portrait of Rachel ; after which she demanded : “ Does n’t such a woman as that receive — receive every one ? ”

“ Every one who goes to see her, no doubt.”

“ And who goes ? ”

“ Lots of men — clever men, eminent men.”

“ Ah, what a charming life ! Then does n’t she go out ? ”

“ Not what we Philistines mean by that — not into society, never. She never enters a lady’s drawing-room.”

“ How strange, when one’s as distinguished as that ; except that she must escape a lot of stupidities and *corvées*. Then where does she learn such manners ? ”

“ She teaches manners, *à ses heures* : she does n’t need to learn them.”

“ Oh, she has given me ideas ! But in London actresses go into society,” Miriam continued.

“ Oh, in London *nous mêlons les genres* ! ”

“ And sha’n’t I go — I mean if I want ? ”

“ You’ll have every facility to bore yourself. Don’t doubt of it.”

“ And does n’t she feel excluded ? ” Miriam asked.

“ Excluded from what ? She has the fullest life.”

"The fullest?"

"An intense artistic life. The cleverest men in Paris talk over her work with her; the principal authors of plays discuss with her subjects and characters and questions of treatment. She lives in the world of art."

"Ah, the world of art — how I envy her! And you offer me Dashwood!"

Sherringham rose in his emotion. "I offer you —?"

Miriam burst out laughing. "You look so droll! You offer me yourself then, instead of all these things."

"My child, I also am a very clever man," he said, smiling, though conscious that for a moment he had stood gaping.

"You are — you are; I delight in you. No ladies at all — no *femmes comme il faut*?" Miriam began again.

"Ah, what do *they* matter? Your business is the artistic life!" he broke out, with in consequence and with a little irritation at hearing her sound that trivial note again.

"You're a dear — your charming good sense comes back to you! What do you want of me, then?"

"I want you for myself — not for others; and now, in time, before anything's done."

"Why then did you bring me here? Everything's done; I feel it to-night."

"I know the way you should look at it —

if you do look at it at all," Sherringham conceded.

"That's so easy! I thought you liked the stage so," Miriam said, artfully.

"Don't you want me to be a great swell?"

"And don't you want *me* to be?"

"You will be — you'll share my glory."

"So will you share mine."

"The husband of an actress? Yes, I'm that!" Sherringham cried, with a frank ring of disgust.

"It's a silly position, no doubt. But if you're too good for it why talk about it? Don't you think I'm important?" Miriam inquired. Her companion stood looking at her, and she suddenly said, in a different tone: "Ah, why should we quarrel, when you have been so kind, so generous? Can't we always be friends — the solidest friends?"

Her voice sank to the sweetest cadence and her eyes were grateful and good as they rested on him. She sometimes said things with such perfection that they seemed dishonest, but in this case Sherringham was stirred to an expressive response. Just as he was making it, however, he was moved to utter other words — "Take care, here's Dashwood!" Mrs. Rooth's companion was in the doorway. He had come back to say that they really must relieve him.

XXII.

MRS. DALLOW came up to London soon after the meeting of Parliament ; she made no secret of the fact that she was fond of the place, and naturally, in present conditions, it would not have become less attractive to her. But she prepared to withdraw from it again for the Easter vacation, not to return to Harsh, but to pay a couple of country visits. She did not, however, leave town with the crowd — she never did anything with the crowd — but waited till the Monday after Parliament rose ; facing with composure, in Great Stanhope Street, the horrors, as she had been taught to consider them, of a Sunday out of the session. She had done what she could to mitigate them by asking a handful of “stray men” to dine with her that evening. Several members of this disconsolate class sought comfort in Great Stanhope Street in the afternoon, and them, for the most part, she also invited to come back at eight o'clock. There were, therefore, almost too many people at dinner — there were even a couple of wives. Nick Dormer came to dinner, but he was not present in the afternoon. Each of the persons who were had said on coming in, “So you’ve not gone — I’m awfully glad.” Mrs.

Dallow had replied, "No, I've not gone," but she had in no case added that she was glad, nor had she offered an explanation. She never offered explanations: she always assumed that no one could invent them so well as those who had the florid taste to desire them.

And in this case she was right, for it is probable that few of her visitors failed to say to themselves that her not having gone would have had something to do with Dormer. That could pass for an explanation with many of Mrs. Dallow's visitors, who, as a general thing, were not morbidly analytic; especially with those who met Nick as a matter of course at the dinner. His being present at this lady's entertainments, being in her house whenever, as the phrase was, a candle was lighted, was taken as a sign that there was something rather particular between them. Nick had said to her, more than once, that people would wonder why they did n't marry; but he was wrong in this, inasmuch as there were many of their friends to whom it would not have occurred that his position could be improved by it. That they were cousins was a fact not so evident to others as to themselves, in consequence of which they appeared remarkably intimate. The person seeing clearest in the matter was Mrs. Gresham, who lived so much in the world that being alone had become her idea of true sociability. She knew very well that if she had been privately engaged to a young man as amia-

ble as Nick Dormer she would have managed that publicity should not play such a part in their intercourse ; and she had her secret scorn for the stupidity of people whose conception of Nick's relation to Julia Dallow rested on the fact that he was always included in her parties. " If he never was there they might talk," she said to herself. But Mrs. Gresham was supersubtle. To her it would have appeared natural that Julia should celebrate the parliamentary recess by going down to Harsh and securing Nick's company there for a fortnight ; she recognized Mrs. Dallow's actual plan as a comparatively poor substitute — the project of spending the holidays in other people's houses, to which Nick had also promised to come. Mrs. Gresham was romantic ; she wondered what was the good of mere snippets and snatches, the chances that any one might have, when large, still days *à deux* were open to you — chances of which half the sanctity was in what they excluded. However, there were more unsettled matters between Mrs. Dallow and her queer kinsman than even Mrs. Gresham's fine insight could embrace. She was not present, on the Sunday before Easter, at the dinner in Great Stanhope Street ; but if she had been Julia's singular indifference to observation would have stopped short of encouraging her to remain in the drawing-room, with Nick, after the others had gone. I may add that Mrs. Gresham's extreme curiosity would have emboldened her as little to do so. She would have taken

for granted that the pair wished to be alone together, though she would have regarded this only as a snippet.

The guests stayed late and it was nearly twelve o'clock when Nick, standing before the fire in the room they had quitted, broke out to his companion :

"See here, Julia, how long do you really expect me to endure this kind of thing?" Mrs. Dallow made him no answer; she only leaned back in her chair with her eyes upon his. He met her gaze for a moment; then he turned round to the fire and for another moment looked into it. After this he faced Mrs. Dallow again, with the exclamation, "It's so foolish — it's so damnably foolish!"

She still said nothing, but at the end of a minute she spoke without answering him. "I shall expect you on Tuesday, and I hope you'll come by a decent train."

"What do you mean by a decent train?"

"I mean I hope you'll not leave it till the last thing before dinner, so that we can have a little walk, or something."

"What's a little walk, or something? Why, if you make such a point of my coming to Griffin, do you want me to come at all?"

Mrs. Dallow hesitated an instant; then she exclaimed: "I knew you hated it!"

"You provoke me so," said Nick. "You try to, I think."

"And Several still worse. You'll get out of that if you can," Mrs. Dallow went on.

"If I can? What's to prevent me?"

"You promised Lady Whiteroy. But of course that's nothing."

"I don't care a straw for Lady Whiteroy."

"And you promised me. But that's less still."

"It *is* foolish — it's quite idiotic," said Nick, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ceiling.

There was another silence, at the end of which Mrs. Dallow remarked: "You might have answered Mr. Macgeorge when he spoke to you."

"Mr. Macgeorge — what has he to do with it?"

"He has to do with your getting on a little. If you think that's the way!"

Nick broke into a laugh. "I like lessons in getting on — in other words, I suppose you mean in urbanity — from you, Julia!"

"Why not from me?"

"Because you can do nothing base. You're incapable of putting on a flattering manner, to get something by it: therefore, why should you expect me to? You're unflattering — that is, you're austere — in proportion as there may be something to be got."

Mrs. Dallow sprang up from her chair, coming towards him. "There is only one thing I want in the world — you know very well."

"Yes, you want it so much that you won't even take it when it's pressed upon you. How long do you seriously expect me to bear it?" Nick repeated.

"I never asked you to do anything base," she said, standing in front of him. "If I'm not clever about throwing myself into things, it's all the more reason you should be."

"If you're not clever, my dear Julia?" Nick, standing close to her, placed his hands on her shoulders and shook her a little, with a mixture of tenderness and passion. "You're clever enough to make me furious, sometimes!"

She opened and closed her fan, looking down at it while she submitted to this attenuated violence. "All I want is that when a man like Mr. Macgeorge talks to you, you should n't appear to be bored to death. You used to be so charming, in that sort of way. And now you appear to take no interest in anything. At dinner, to-night, you scarcely opened your lips; you treated them all as if you only wished they'd go."

"I did wish they'd go. Have n't I told you a hundred times what I think of your salon?"

"How then do you want me to live?" Mrs. Dallow asked. "Am I not to have a creature in the house?"

"As many creatures as you like. Your freedom is complete, and as far as I am concerned always will be. Only when you challenge me and overhaul me — not justly, I think — I must

confess the simple truth, that there are many of your friends I don't delight in."

"Oh, *your* idea of pleasant people!" Julia exclaimed. "I should like once for all to know what it really is."

"I can tell you what it really is n't: it is n't Mr. Macgeorge. He's a being almost grotesquely limited."

"He'll be where you'll never be — unless you change."

"To be where Mr. Macgeorge is not would be very much my desire. Therefore, why should I change?" Nick demanded. "However, I had n't the least intention of being rude to him, and I don't think I was," he went on. "To the best of my ability I assume a virtue if I have it not; but apparently I'm not enough of a comedian."

"If you have it not? It's when you say things like that that you're so dreadfully tiresome. As if there were anything that you have n't or might n't have!"

Nick turned away from his hostess; he took a few impatient steps in the room, looking at the carpet, with his hands in his pockets again. Then he came back to the fire with the observation, "It's rather hard to be found so wanting when one has tried to play one's part so beautifully." He paused, with his eyes on Mrs. Dallow's; then continued, with a vibration in his voice: "I've imperiled my immortal soul, or at least I've bemuddled my intelligence, by all the

things I don't care for that I've tried to do, and all the things I detest that I've tried to be, and all the things I never can be that I've tried to look as if I were — all the appearances and imitations, the pretenses and hypocrisies in which I've steeped myself to the eyes ; and at the end of it (it serves me right !) my reward is simply to learn that I'm still not half humbug enough !”

Mrs. Dallow looked away from him as soon as he had spoken these words ; she attached her eyes to the clock which stood behind him, and observed irrelevantly :

“I'm very sorry, but I think you had better go. I don't like you to stay after midnight.”

“Ah, what you like and what you don't like, and where one begins and the other ends — all that is an impenetrable mystery !” the young man declared. But he took no further notice of her allusion to his departure, adding, in a different tone : “‘A man like Mr. Macgeorge' ! When you say a thing of that sort, in a certain particular way, I should rather like to suffer you to perish.”

Mrs. Dallow stared ; it might have seemed for an instant that she was trying to look stupid. “How can I help it if a few years hence he is certain to be at the head of any Liberal government ?”

“We can't help it, of course, but we can help talking about it,” Nick smiled. “If we don't mention it, it may not be noticed.”

"You're trying to make me angry. You're in one of your vicious moods," observed Mrs. Dallow, blowing out, on the chimney-piece, a guttering candle.

"That I am exasperated I have already had the honor very positively to inform you. All the same I maintain that I was irreproachable at dinner. I don't want you to think I shall always be so good as that."

"You looked so out of it; you were as gloomy as if every earthly hope had left you, and you did n't make a single contribution to any discussion that took place. Don't you think I observe you?" Mrs. Dallow asked, with an irony tempered by a tenderness that was unsuccessfully concealed.

"Ah, my darling, what you observe!" Nick exclaimed, laughing, and stopping. But he added the next moment, more seriously, as if his tone had been disrespectful: "You probe me to the bottom, no doubt."

"You need n't come either to Griffin or to Severals if you don't want to."

"Give them up yourself; stay here with me!"

She colored quickly, as he said this, and broke out: "Lord! how you hate political houses!"

"How can you say that, when from February to August I spend every blessed night in one?"

"Yes, and hate that worst of all."

"So do half the people who are in it. You must have so many things, so many people, so

much *mise-en-scène* and such a perpetual spectacle to live," Nick went on. "Perpetual motion, perpetual visits, perpetual crowds! If you go into the country you'll see forty people every day and be mixed up with them all day. The idea of a quiet fortnight in town, when by a happy if idiotic superstition everybody goes out of it, disconcerts and frightens you. It's the very time, it's the very place, to do a little work and possess one's soul."

This vehement allocution found Mrs. Dallow evidently somewhat unprepared; but she was sagacious enough, instead of attempting for the moment a general rejoinder, to seize on a single phrase and say: "Work? What work can you do in London at such a moment as this?"

Nick hesitated a little. "I might tell you that I wanted to get up a lot of subjects, to sit at home and read bluebooks; but that would n't be quite what I mean."

"Do you mean you want to paint?"

"Yes, that's it, since you drag it out of me."

"Why do you make such a mystery about it? You're at perfect liberty," said Mrs. Dallow.

She extended her hand to rest it on the mantel-shelf, but her companion took it, on the way, and held it in both his own. "You are delightful, Julia, when you speak in that tone — then I know why it is I love you; but I can't do anything if I go to Griffin, if I go to Severals."

"I see — I see," said Julia, reflectively and kindly.

"I've scarcely been inside of my studio for months, and I feel quite homesick for it. The idea of putting in a few quiet days there has taken hold of me : I rather cling to it."

"It seems so odd, your having a studio !" Julia dropped, speaking so quickly that the words were almost incomprehensible.

"Does n't it sound absurd, for all the good it does me, or I do in it ? Of course one can produce nothing but rubbish on such terms — without continuity or persistence, with just a few days here and there. I ought to be ashamed of myself, no doubt ; but even my rubbish interests me. 'Guenille si l'on veut, ma guenille m'est chère.' But I'll go down to Harsh with you, in a moment, Julia," Nick pursued : "that would do as well, if we could be quiet there, without people, without a creature ; and I should really be perfectly content. You'd sit for me ; it would be the occasion we've so often wanted and never found."

Mrs. Dallow shook her head slowly, with a smile that had a meaning for Nick. "Thank you, my dear ; nothing would induce me to go to Harsh with you."

The young man looked at her. "What's the matter, whenever it's a question of anything of that sort ? Are you afraid of me ?" She pulled her hand quickly out of his, turning away from him ; but he went on : "Stay with me here, then, when everything is so right for it. We shall do

beautifully — have the whole place, have the whole day to ourselves. Hang your engagements! Telegraph you won't come. We'll live at the studio — you'll sit to me every day. Now or never is our chance — when shall we have so good a one? Think how charming it will be! I'll make you wish awfully that I shall do something."

"I can't get out of Griffin — it's impossible," returned Mrs. Dallow, moving further away, with her back presented to him.

"Then you *are* afraid of me — simply!"

She turned quickly round, very pale. "Of course I am; you are welcome to know it."

He went toward her, and for a moment she seemed to make another slight movement of retreat. This, however, was scarcely perceptible, and there was nothing to alarm in the tone of reasonable entreaty in which Nick said to her, as he went toward her: "Put an end, Julia, to our absurd situation — it really can't go on: you have no right to expect a man to be happy or comfortable in so false a position. We're talked of odiously — of that we may be sure; and yet what good have we of it?"

"Talked of? Do I care for that?"

"Do you mean you're indifferent because there are no grounds? That's just why I hate it."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, with quick disdain.

"Be my wife to-morrow — be my wife next

week. Let us have done with this fantastic probation and be happy."

"Leave me now — come back to-morrow. I'll write to you." She had the air of pleading with him at present as he pleaded with her.

"You can't resign yourself to the idea of one's looking 'out of it'!" laughed Nick.

"Come to-morrow, before lunch," Mrs. Dallow continued.

"To be told I must wait six months more and then be sent about my business? Ah, Julia, Julia!" murmured the young man.

Something in this simple exclamation — it sounded natural and perfectly unstudied — evidently, on the instant, made a great impression on his companion.

"You shall wait no longer," she said, after a short silence.

"What do you mean by no longer?"

"Give me about five weeks — say till the Whitsuntide recess."

"Five weeks are a great deal," smiled Nick.

"There are things to be done — you ought to understand."

"I only understand how I love you."

"Dearest Nick!" said Mrs. Dallow; upon which he caught her in his arms.

"I have your promise, then, for five weeks hence, to a day?" he demanded, as she released herself.

"We'll settle that — the exact day: there are

things to consider and to arrange. Come to luncheon, to-morrow."

"I'll come early — I'll come at one," Nick said; and for a moment they stood smiling at each other.

"Do you think I *want* to wait, any more than you?" Mrs. Dallow asked.

"I don't feel so much out of it now!" he exclaimed, by way of answer. "You'll stay, of course, now — you'll give up your visits?"

She had hold of the lappet of his coat; she had kept it in her hand even while she detached herself from his embrace. There was a white flower in his buttonhole which she looked at and played with a moment before she said: "I have a better idea — you need n't come to Griffin. Stay in your studio — do as you like — paint dozens of pictures."

"Dozens? You barbarian!" Nick ejaculated.

The epithet apparently had an endearing suggestion to Mrs. Dallow; at any rate it led her to allow him to kiss her on her forehead — led her to say, "What on earth do I want but that you should do absolutely as you please and be as happy as you can?"

Nick kissed her again, in another place, at this; but he inquired: "What dreadful proposition is coming now?"

"I'll go off and do up my visits and come back."

"And leave me alone?"

"Don't be affected!" said Mrs. Dallow. "You know you'll work much better without me. You'll live in your studio—I shall be well out of the way."

"That's not what one wants of a sitter. How can I paint you?"

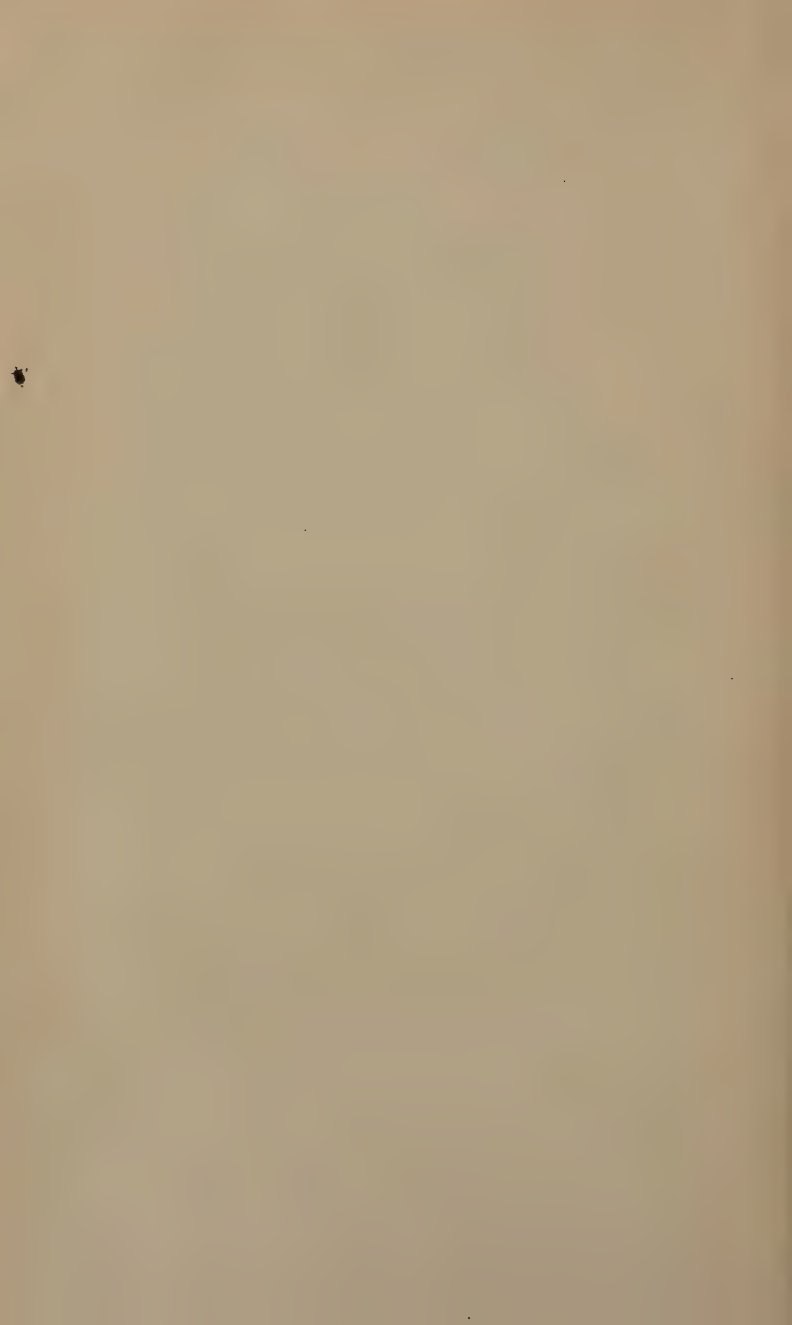
"You can paint me all the rest of your life. I shall be a perpetual sitter."

"I believe I could paint you without looking at you," said Nick, smiling down at her. "You do excuse me, then, from those dreary places?"

"How can I insist, after what you said about the pleasure of keeping these days?" Mrs. Dallow asked sweetly.

"You're the best woman on earth; though it does seem odd you should rush away as soon as our little business is settled."

"We shall make it up. I know what I'm about. And now go!" Mrs. Dallow terminated, almost pushing her visitor out of the room.



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